

Sūrah 'Al-'Imrān

Verses 1-6

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الَمْ ﴿١﴾ اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ ﴿٢﴾ نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكَ
الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنزَلَ التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ
﴿٣﴾ مِنْ قَبْلُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَأَنزَلَ الْفُرْقَانَ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ ذُو انتِقَامٍ ﴿٤﴾ إِنَّ
اللَّهَ لَا يَخْفَى عَلَيْهِ شَيْءٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ ﴿٥﴾
هُوَ الَّذِي يَصَوِّرُكُمْ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ كَيْفَ يَشَاءُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ
الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٦﴾

With the name of Allah

the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful.

Alif Lām Mim. [1] Allah: There is no god but He, the Alive, the All-Sustaining. [2] He has revealed to you the Book with the truth confirming what has been before it, and sent down the Torah and Injil¹ [3] (the Evangile) earlier to give guidance to mankind, and sent down the *Furqān* (the Criterion of right and wrong). Surely, those who have rejected the verses of Allah, for them there is severe punishment. And Allah is Mighty, Lord of Retribution. [4] Surely, Allah is such that nothing is hidden from Him, either in the earth or in the heaven. [5] He is the one who shapes you in the wombs as He likes. There is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise. [6]

1. Whenever the Holy Qur'an speaks of the 'Torah and the Injil' it refers to the original books revealed to the prophets Moses and Jesus عليهما السلام. This should not, therefore, be confused with the present Old and New testaments.

This is the first section of Sūrah 'Āl-Imrān, the third Sūrah of the Holy Qur'an. It will be recalled that at the end of the Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah a prayer for guidance to the straight path was made. After that, by beginning the Sūrah Al-Baqarah with **ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ** (This Book which has no doubt in it), it was pointed out that the prayer made in Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah for guidance to the straight path has been accepted and Allah Almighty has sent down this Qur'an which provides guidance to the straight path. Then came many injunctions of the Islamic law taken up briefly or in details. As a corollary to this, frequent mention was made of the hostility of the disbelievers and the need to confront them. Towards the end, this sequence was concluded with **وَأَنْصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ** (Help us, then, against disbelieving people) - in the mode of prayer. Since the prayer was made in order that Muslims could confront and prevail over the disbelievers, it was in consonance with that prayer that, in the following Sūrah 'Āl-Imrān, the text deals with the modalities of dealing with disbelievers, as well as, with the need to carry out *Jihād* against them, verbally and physically. This is, so to speak, an elaboration and extension of **وَأَنْصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ** (Help us, then, against disbelieving people).

A Summary of Meanings

These first five verses of Sūrah 'Āl-Imrān explain the doctrine of *Tauḥīd*, the Oneness of Allah, which is the basic point of difference between Islam and other religions and between a disbeliever and a true Muslim. Those who believe in the Oneness of Allah (and in all His prophets - عليهم السلام) are Muslims and those who do not so believe are known as disbelievers or non-Muslims. The first verse of this section presents a rational proof of the Oneness of Allah; the second verse, the reported proof¹, followed by an answer to some doubts nursed by disbelievers towards the later part.

The first word, *Alif Lām Mīm* (الم) at the head of the first verse belongs to the special set of words used by the Qur'an which are words of hidden meaning and are known as *Mutashābihāt*, the real meaning of

1. In the terminology of Islamic theology, a proof based on rational argument is called rational proof while a proof based on a verse of divine book or on a declaration made by an authority or a report narrated by a trustworthy person is called a reported proof.

which is a secret between Allah and His Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم, and the details of which appear a little later in the section. In the words الله لا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ (Allah: there is no god but He) which follow immediately, the doctrine of the Oneness of Allah has been put forth as a categorical declaration. It means that there is absolutely nothing worthy of worship other than Allah.

Then come the words . . . الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ (the Alive, the All-Sustaining) which lay out a rational proof of the Oneness of Allah. The essence of the argument is that worship means to present oneself before somebody in utter submission and humility. It, therefore, requires that the one who is being worshipped must occupy the highest point of honour and power and who has to be most perfect from all angles. From this it is obvious that anything which cannot sustain its own being, rather is dependent upon somebody else for its very existence, could hardly claim to have any honour or power in its own right. Therefore, it is crystal clear that all things in this world which have no power to come into being by themselves, nor can they sustain it - be they idols carved in stone, or water, or trees, or angels and apostles - none of them is worthy of worship. The only Being worthy of worship is the One who has always been Alive and Present and shall always live and sustain. Such a Being is none but Allah; there is none worthy of worship but Him.

Verse 3 which follows carries the reported proof of the Oneness of Allah. Briefly stated, it means that the principle of *Tauhīd* as described in the Holy Qur'an is not something peculiar to the Qur'an or the Prophet of Islam. On the contrary, Allah Almighty has sent Scriptures such as the Torah and the Injil, and His prophets, in earlier times. And this was they all professed and this was they all brought as the message. When the Qur'an came, it simply confirmed their truth. It did not present any new claim which could pose problems for people in its understanding or acceptance.

The last two verses further fortify the doctrine of *Tauhīd* on the ground that the attributes of encompassing knowledge and unlimited power are strong proofs of His being the One who possesses the eternal and all-encompassing knowledge and whose power controls everything, and that He is the only One who rightly deserves to be wor-

shipped. Any one having imperfect knowledge and limited power cannot be entrusted with this exalted station.

***Tauḥīd* a consistent belief preached by all prophets**

Verse 2 gives a reported proof in some detail. The agreement of a large number of people on a certain principle from the very beginning of humanity may be taken as a natural proof of its reality, if they belong to different times and places, having no means of communicating with each other.

Keeping this in view, we see that Sayyidna Ādam عليه السلام was the first prophet who presented the message of *Tauḥīd* before human beings. That the message would remain effective after him through his progeny is not difficult to conceive. But, after a passage of time when the ways of the progeny of Sayyidna Ādam عليه السلام shifted away from the original message, there comes Sayyidna Nūḥ عليه السلام (Noah) who calls people towards the same principle. After a long passage of time, Sayyidna Ibrāhīm, Ismā'il, Ishāq and Yāqūb عليهم السلام born in Iraq and Syria rise with the same call. Then follow Sayyidna Mūsā, Hārūn and other prophets in that order who all subscribe to the same principle of *Tauḥīd* and invite people to the same. Then, after another long passage of time, Sayyidna 'Īsā rises with the same call. In the end, it is Sayyidna Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā صلى الله عليه وسلم who graces the world with the common call of all prophets.

This is the golden chain of prophets from Sayyidna Ādam to the Last of the Prophets صلى الله عليه وسلم upto whose time some one hundred and twenty four thousand blessed prophets were born in different periods, speaking different languages, living in different countries. All of them told and taught the same truth. Most of them did not even have the chance to meet each other. They were in an age when, communication through writing was not in vogue, which could make it possible for one prophet to have access to the books and writings of another and might help him to pick up the call of the earlier prophets as his own. Instead, what happened is that everyone from among them appeared centuries apart from each other, and had no source of information about other prophets, except the revelation received by him from Allah Almighty. The consensus of such a large group of persons consisting of not less than one hundred and twenty four thousand men of

different times and places may be enough for establishing the principle, even regardless of their intrinsic trustworthiness. But when one looks at the personal qualities of the noble prophets, and at the highest possible standards of truth and justice set by them, one has to believe that their message is true and their call authentic.

It is narrated in some *aḥādīth* that some Christians came to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and engaged him in a conversation about religion. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, by the will of Allah, presented these two verses as arguments confirming the Oneness of Allah. The Christians had no answer to refute them.

Lastly, while referring to the absolute power and wisdom of Allah Almighty, verse 6 invites one's attention to the fact that Allah shapes all men and women in the wombs of their mothers according to His supreme wisdom which has created billions of men and women with clear distinguishable features establishing the identity of each individual distinct from all others. He is, therefore, the only One who should be worshipped.

Verse 7

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ
الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ
فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا
يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ
كُلُّ مِّنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿٧﴾

He is the One who has revealed to you the Book. A number of its verses are *Muḥkamāt* (of established meaning) - and those are the principal verses of the Book - and others, *Mutashābihāt* (whose definite meanings are unknown). Now those who have crookedness in their hearts go after such part of it as is *mutashābih* seeking (to create) discord and searching for its interpretation while no one knows its interpretation except Allah. And those well-grounded in knowledge say: "We believe therein; all is from our Lord." And only the men of understanding do observe the advice. [7]

Moving from the affirmation of the principle of Allah's Oneness, the text now answers some doubts raised against it. As stated briefly a little earlier, this verse was revealed in a specific background. Once a group of Christians came to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and started talking about religion. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم refuted their doctrine of Trinity in details and proved the Oneness of Allah with reference to the eternal existence, the perfect power, the all-encompassing knowledge and the most unique creativity of Allah Almighty who had to be One and indivisible. The Christians had to accept these premises and once *Tauḥīd* was proved, the converse, that is, the belief in Trinity was also proved untenable. The Christians then expressed their doubts about some words of the Holy Qur'ān in which Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام i.e. Jesus Christ has been called '*Rūḥullāh*' (the Spirit of Allah) or '*Kalimatullāh*' (the Word of Allah), which according to them led to prove that Sayyidnā 'Īsā had a share in the divinity of Allah.

Through this verse, Allah Almighty has put an end to these doubts by saying that such expressions are in the category of *Mutashābihāt* where the outward meaning is not intended; they are, rather, a secret between Allah and His Messenger, the reality of which cannot become manifest to others for whom it is not even appropriate to go about determining the possible meanings of these words. One has to have faith in them by believing that whatever Allah Almighty has elected to mean through them is the truth. It is not permissible to dig deeper and mount further researches in this direction.

Meaning of محكم : *Muḥkam* and متشابه : *Mutashābih*

Allah Almighty has, by mentioning محكمات : *Muḥkamāt* and متشابهات : *Mutashābihāt* right there in the beginning, pointed out towards a general principle which, if understood, could eradicate many doubts and disputes. The principle is that the Holy Qur'ān has two kinds of verses; one is known as the *Muḥkamāt* (of established meaning) and the other as the *Mutashābihāt* (whose definite meanings are unknown).

Muḥkamāt is the name of verses the meaning of which is open and clear to one who knows the rules of Arabic grammar fairly well. But when the meanings and explanations of particular verses are not clear to such a person, then, such verses are called the *Mutashābihāt*. (Mazhari, v.2)

Allah Almighty has called the first kind of verses, that is, the *Muḥkamāt* - أم الكتاب : 'Um̄n al-Kitāb' (which has been translated literally as 'mother verses') meaning thereby that such verses are the very root and essence of all teachings, and the meanings and explanations of which are free of doubt or ambiguity.

Since the exact intention of the second kind of verses, that is, the *Mutashābihāt*, remains ambiguous and uncertain, therefore, the correct method of their interpretation would be to harmonize them with the first kind, that is, the *Muḥkamāt*. Then, the rule is that any interpretation of the *Mutashābihāt* which goes against the first kind should be rejected absolutely and only that interpretation should be given credence which is not against the verses of established meaning (*Muḥkamāt*). For example, the Holy Qur'ān has clarified the position of Sayyidnā 'Isā عليه السلام (Jesus Christ) by saying إِنَّهُ هُوَ إِلَّا عَبْدٌ أَنْعَمْنَا عَلَيْهِ (he is nothing but a servant upon whom We have bestowed Our blessing- 43:59), or as elsewhere in the Qur'ān, by مَثَلُ عِيسَىٰ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ آدَمَ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ (the example of 'Isā before Allah is like that of Ādam whom He created from clay - 3:59).

These and several other verses like them show it clearly that Sayyidnā 'Isā Masīh, عليه السلام, is a chosen servant of Allah created by Him. Therefore, the claim of Christians investing him with godhood and sonship is not correct.

Now, if someone closes his eyes towards all these verses which have an established meaning and unnecessarily coils with the expressions, كلمة الله (the Word of Allah) and روح منه (a spirit from Him) and their likes from the category of *Mutashābihāt* (verses whose definite meanings cannot be ascertained) and starts deducing from them meanings which are against the *Muḥkamāt* of Qur'ān and other consistent statements, then, that would be a simple case of going astray and being obstinate.

The real meanings of *Mutashābihāt* are known to Allah alone. It is He who, in His mercy and favour, informs anyone He chooses of whatever part of the unknown He wills. Therefore, it is not correct to try and impose a certain meaning based on one's personal opinion.

The purpose of the statement, 'فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ مِنْ تَلَوِّهِمْ رَنُوعٌ' now those who have

crookedness in their hearts...' is that people who are gentle in nature do not go about investigating much about *Mutashābihāt*. Instead, they accept these verses and simply believe in them taking these as the true Word of Allah. They realise that He, due to some wise consideration of His, did not reveal to us their meaning. This approach is, indeed, the safest and the most cautious. But, quite contrary to this, there still are people with crookedness in their hearts. They, with eyes closed, go on investigating and deliberating on *Mutashābihāt* to justify meanings that suit their fancies so that they can lead people astray. For such people, stern warnings have appeared in the Qur'an and *Hadīth*.

Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضى الله عنها says that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: When you see people busy investigating into the *Mutashābihāt*, stay away from them because these are the same people Allah has talked about (in the Qur'an). (Bukhari, v.2)

In another *hadīth*, he said: I have three apprehensions about my people (*ummah*): (1) That they become wealthy and start to envy each other resulting in rifts and bloodshed; (2) that the Book of Allah is trifled with (that is, even the uninitiated and ignorant claim its perfect understanding through translations) and that which is not supposed to be understood (*Mutashābihāt*) becomes the very object of deliberations and investigations although Allah alone is the One who knows their meaning; (3) that they allow their knowledge, once it has increased, go to waste by forsaking efforts to increase it further. (Ibn Kathīr with reference to Tabarānī)

Who are the ones 'well grounded' in knowledge as identified towards the end of the verse: **وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرْوَدُونَ أَتَاهُمْ** ? Muslims scholars have offered different explanations in this connection. The weightier position is that the reference here is to *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah*, the main body of Muslims who give credence only to that interpretation and explanation of the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah which has been authentically reported from the blessed Companions, the righteous generations following them and upon which there is the consensus of the Muslim community, and who believe that the *Muḥkamāt* (verses of established meaning) of Qur'an are its axis and centre, and who, humbly confessing their limitations of knowledge and insight, leave to Al-

lah the real meanings of *Mutashābihāt* which are beyond their comprehension and conceptualization. They are never proud of their knowledge, howsoever perfect it may be, nor of the strength of their faith. Instead of that, they constantly pray to Allah seeking steadfastness from Him, and His grace and mercy. They do not have mischief-prone temperaments which would instigate them to follow *Mutashābihāt* alone as the object of their intellectual pursuit. They take both, the *Muḥkamāt* and the *Mutashābihāt*, to be the truth because they firmly believe that both kinds of verses have emanated from one single source. But, the need to find out the meanings of the *Muḥkamāt* was, of course, useful and essential for us. This Allah Almighty has not kept secret. The meanings of such verses have been made very open and clear. Since Allah Almighty has elected not to disclose the meanings of *Mutashābihāt* to us due to some wise consideration of His, it is simply not necessary for us to find it out. That we believe in them as they are is quite sufficient. (Abridged from Mazhari)

Verses 8 - 9

رَبَّنَا لَا تَزِغْ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْتَنَا وَهَبْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً
إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْوَهَّابُ ﴿٨﴾ رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ جَامِعُ النَّاسِ لِيَوْمٍ لَا رَيْبَ
فِيهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُخْلِفُ الْمِيعَادَ ﴿٩﴾

"Our Lord, do not let our hearts go crooked after You have given us guidance, and bestow upon us mercy from Your own. Surely, You, and You alone, are the Bestower. [8] Our Lord, You are going to assemble all the people on a day in which there is no doubt. Verily, Allah does not go back on His promise." [9]

Sequence

The previous verse mentioned 'those well-grounded in knowledge' who, in spite of their excellent knowledge, were not proud of their excellence. Instead of that, they elected to have faith in what comes from their Lord. The present verse mentions yet another excellence of theirs - that they pray for steadfastness on the right path, not for any worldly gains, but for salvation in the life-to-come.

Commentary

The first verse (8) shows us that guidance and straying are from

Allah alone. When Allah intends to guide someone, He makes his heart tilt towards what is good and right; and when He decides to let someone go astray, He turns his heart away from the straight path.

This is just as it was said in a *ḥadīth* of the Holy Prophet ﷺ : There is no heart which is not there in between the two of Allah's fingers - He makes it firm on the truth as long as He wills, and turns it away from the truth when He wills.

He is Allah, absolute in power. He does what He wills. Therefore, those who are concerned about how to remain firm in their faith, they go to the source - requesting and praying Allah for steadfastness. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم always used to pray for it as it appears in a *ḥadīth*: يَا مُقَلِّبَ الْقُلُوبِ ثَبِّتْ قُلُوبَنَا عَلَى دِينِكَ (O reverser of hearts, make our hearts firm on the faith chosen by You). (Mazhari)

Verses 10 - 12

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَنْ تُغْنِيَ عَنْهُمْ أَمْوَالُهُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا ۖ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمْ وَقُودُ النَّارِ ﴿١٠﴾ كَذَّبُوا بِالْآيَاتِ الَّتِي لَا يَمَسُّهُمْ فِيهَا مِنْ آلِ الْفِرْعَوْنَ ۖ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا ۖ فَآخَذَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ ۖ وَاللَّهُ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ ﴿١١﴾ قُلْ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَتُغْلَبُونَ وَتُحْشَرُونَ إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ ۖ وَبُسْ إِلَيْهَا ۖ ﴿١٢﴾

"Surely, those who disbelieve, their wealth and their children shall not at all suffice them a bit against Allah. And those are the fuel of the Fire [10] - a case similar to that of the House of Pharaoh and those before them. They denied our signs. So, Allah caught them for their sins. And Allah is severe at punishment. [11] Say to those who disbelieve: "You shall soon be overcome and gathered into Hell. And it is an evil bed to rest." [12]

Sequence

The text now shifts from the verbal confrontation with disbelievers on the warnings about the coming physical encounter as pointed out in verse 12 - 'You shall soon be overcome (by Muslims)' - while the verses earlier (10 and 11) serve as the introduction.

Commentary

Some readers of verse 12: قُلْ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَعْلَةٌ, just cited, above may have some doubt about disbelievers being overcome because this is not the case with all disbelievers of the world. But, this doubt is unfounded as the disbelievers referred to here are the disbelievers and Jews of that particular time - from among whom, the pagans were overcome when killed or taken prisoners, and the Jews were overcome through killing or imprisonment as well as through *Jizya* and extradition. Therefore, this 'overcoming' of disbelievers mentioned in the verse simply does not refer to disbelievers universally.

Verses 13

قَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ آيَةٌ فِي فِتْنَتِ الثَّقَاتِ فِتْنَةُ تُقَاتِلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
وَأُخْرَى كَافِرَةٌ يَرَوْنَهُمْ مِثْلَيْهِمْ رَأَى الْعَيْنُ وَاللَّهُ يُؤَيِّدُ بِنَصَرِهِ
مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لِّأُولِي الْأَبْصَارِ ﴿١٣﴾

"There was a sign for you in the two groups who faced each other: One group fighting in the way of Allah, and the other disbelieving, seeing themselves as twice of them, with open eyes. And Allah gives strength with His help to whomsoever He wills. Indeed, there is a lesson therein for those who have eyes." [13]

Sequence

In the previous verses, the disbelievers were informed that they will be overcome. Now, cited in this verse is an example of how the prophecy has been fulfilled.

Commentary

This verse refers to the Battle of Badr in which the disbelievers had about 1000 men, 700 camels and 100 horses, while the Muslim *mujāhidīn* were just over 300, having a total of 70 camels, 2 horses, 6 armours and 8 swords. The encounter was certainly strange as each combating group saw the opponent being twice its own numbers. The sighting of so many Muslims inspired awe in the hearts of the disbelievers, while Muslims who saw the disbelievers as twice of them turned to Allah more fervently. They had hopes of Allah's help, and ultimate victory, because they had placed their total trust in Allah, were

steadfast and sincerely believed in the promise of Allah revealed to them in the following words:

إِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ مِائَةٌ صَابِرَةٌ يَغْلِبُوا مِائَتَيْنِ

If there be among you a hundred patient ones, they shall overcome two hundred. (8:66)

If the actual number of disbelievers which was three times more than their own were to be realized by Muslims, they may have been overawed. This state of sighting the numbers of the other group as twice its own was at a particular time. At another time each of the two combating groups felt the other one as low in numbers, as it would appear later in Sūrah al-Anfal.

To sum up, it can be safely said that making a small group of people with very little to fight against a much stronger group and score a victory, as prophesied in Makkah, is an unusual event full of lessons for the observant and the discerning.

Verses 14 - 17

زُيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ الشَّهَوَاتِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ وَالْبَنِينَ وَالْقَنَاطِيرِ
الْمُقَنْطَرَةِ مِنَ الذَّهَبِ وَالْفِضَّةِ وَالْخَيْلِ الْمُسَوَّمَةِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ
وَالْحَرْثِ ذَلِكَ مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الْمَا
بِ ﴿١٤﴾ قُلْ أَوْفُوا بِعَهْدِكُمْ بِخَيْرٍ مِّنْ ذَلِكُمْ لِلَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ
جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَأَزْوَاجٌ مُّطَهَّرَةٌ
وَرِضْوَانٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِالْعِبَادِ ﴿١٥﴾ الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ
رَبَّنَا إِنَّا أَمْنَا فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ ﴿١٦﴾
الصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالْقَنِتَّةِينَ وَالْمُنْفِقِينَ وَالْمُسْتَغْفِرِينَ
بِالْأَسْحَارِ ﴿١٧﴾

It has been made attractive for people to love the desires; that is, the women, the children, the hoarded heaps of gold and silver, the branded horses, the cattle and the tillage. That is an enjoyment of the worldly life. And with Allah lies the beauty of the final resort. [14]

Say: "Shall I tell you what is far better than that? For those who fear (Allah), there are with their Lord gardens beneath which rivers flow where they shall live for ever, and wives purified, and approval from Allah. And Allah is watchful over His servants" [15] - those who say: "Our Lord, surely we have believed, so forgive us our sins and save us from the punishment of the Fire" [16] (and those who are) the patient, the truthful and the devout, who spend (in Allah's way) and who seek forgiveness in pre-dawn hours." [17]

Sequence

That the hostility of disbelievers should be countered with *Jihad* against them was the theme in several previous verses. Now, in these verses the text explains the reason why the disbelievers indulge in hostility against Islam and Muslims. The reason for this and for all evil deeds is, in fact, the love of the worldly life. There are all sorts of people who line up against the truth - some driven by greed for wealth or power, some goaded by lust and some in defence of false ancestral customs. All this is just to grab a share in the temporal enjoyments of the present life which has been described in these verses.

Commentary

The limits of one's love for worldly enjoyments

The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said: **مَحَبَّةُ الدُّنْيَا رَأْسُ كُلِّ خَطِيئَةٍ**. It means that the love of *dunya* (worldly life or worldly enjoyments) is the main source of all errors. The first verse here names some of the most desired things and says that they have been made to look attractive and therefore, people go after them enticed by their glamour brushing aside any concerns for the life to come, if there be any.

It will be noted that things named here are the center of attraction for human beings, out of which, women come first and then the children. For whatever man goes about procuring is because of the needs of his family - wife and children - to share it with him. Then come other forms of wealth and possessions - gold, silver, cattle and tillage - which attract people secondarily.

Why has man been made in a way that he is temperamentally attracted to these things? The answer is that Allah has done so in His ultimate wisdom. Let us consider:

1. If man was not naturally inclined to and even enamoured with these things, all wordly business would have gone topsy-turvy. Why would someone sweat on farms and fields? Why would a wage-earner or an entrepreneur burn themselves out in an industry, or a businessman would put his capital and labour in buying and selling things? The secret was that the people of the world were made to grow and survive through this instinctive love for such things whereby they would go about collecting and preserving these. The worker goes out to earn some money. The well-to-do goes out to hire a worker for his job. The trader brings forth his best merchandise for display waiting for a customer to earn something from. A customer goes to the shopping mall to buy things he needs to live or be happy with. If we think about it, we shall realize that it was the love for what is desirable in this mortal world which brought them out of their homes, and in this silent process, gave the world a strong and ongoing social system.

There is yet another element of wisdom behind it. If man had no liking for the blessings he finds in the mortal world, he would obviously have no taste or desire for blessings promised in the world to come. That being the case, why would he ever take the trouble of doing what is good and thus become deserving of Paradise, and not doing what is evil and thus become safe from Hell?

There is still another element of wisdom which is more significant for consideration here. Is it not that man, with love for these things in his heart, has been put to a test as to who becomes engrossed in the enjoyments of the present life and forgets the life to come, and who comes to realize the real and temporal nature of these things, shows concern for them only in proportion to his needs, and then channels all his efforts into deeds that would make his next life good and safe? The wisdom behind the adornment of such things has been pointed out elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an itself:

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لِّهَا لِنَبْلُوهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا

We made whatever there is on the earth its adornment so that
We can test as to who among them acts best. (18:7)

The verse cited above clearly shows that the glamourizing of such desirable things is an act of God based on many wise considerations:

However, as for verses where such glamourization of things has been attributed to Satan - for example, **زَيْنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَعْمَالَهُمْ** (the Satan has made their deeds look attractive to them - 8:48; 16:63; 27:24; 29:38.) - there the reference is to things that are evil, religiously and rationally; or, the reference is to a false sense of adornment which is evil because it transgresses the limits set by Allah. Otherwise, it is not absolutely bad to adorn the lawful things. In fact, there may be a few benefits in doing so. Therefore, this act of placing attraction in things in some verses has been attributed to Allah, as stated above.

Let us summarize our discussion so far and see how it works for us in our practical life. We now know that Allah created, in His grace and wisdom, all good things of life in this world, made them look attractive and - worthy of man's effort to acquire them so that man can be tested. This is one of Allah's many acts of wisdom to see whether the man gets swayed by the glamour of the fleeting enjoyment of things, or remembers the Creator of these things, or the man forgets the very Creator of his own being as well. Aided by this realization, does man make these things a medium through which to know and love Allah; or, is it that he would elect to get totally lost in the love for these known transitory things, and forget all about the real Master and Creator before Whom he must appear on the Last Day and account for whatever he did.

On the one hand is a person who has the best of both worlds. He enjoys the blessings of the present life and uses its means for success in the life to come. For him, the enjoyments of the mortal world did not become a road-block; rather, they proved to be the milestones which led him safely into a prosperous Hereafter. But, for the other person these very things became the causes that led him to squander his chance of having a good life in the Hereafter, and also became the very cause of perennial punishment. Frankly, if we were to look a little deeper, we would realize that these things become a sort of punishment for him right here in this world as well. For such people, the Holy Qur'an says:

فَلَا تُعْجِبْكَ أَمْوَالُهُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُهُمْ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُعَذِّبَهُمْ بِهَا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا

So, their wealth and children should not attract you. Allah wants to punish them with these in this lowly life - 9:55.

Thus, the lesson is that we can seek good things of life with moderation and even store them in accordance with our genuine needs. In this lies the ultimate good of this life and the life to come. Using them in prohibited ways, or indulging in them so excessively that one forgets the post-death reality of *Ākhirah* is nothing but self-destruction. The poet-sage, Maulānā Rūmī has illustrated this very eloquently when he said;

آب اندر زیر کشتی پستی است
آب در کشتی هلاک کشتی است

He says that things of this world with which we surround ourselves are like water, and the heart of man is like a boat in it. As long as the water remains beneath and around the boat, it is good and helpful, and certainly guarantees the very purpose of its being there. But, if water gets into the boat, it makes the boat capsize and destroys all that was in it. Similarly, man's wealth and possessions are means of convenience for his role in this world and in the life to come - provided that they do not enter into his heart, sit there, and kill it in the process. Therefore, the verse under discussion, immediately after mentioning some specially desirable things of the world, presents the essential guideline for human beings by saying:

ذَلِكَ مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الْمَاٰبِ

That is an enjoyment of the worldly life. And with Allah lies the beauty of the final resort. (3:14)

In other words, it means that all these things are there simply to serve a purpose in man's mortal life in the present world and certainly not to have him fall in love with things for their own sake, for the real beauty of the experience lies in one's ultimate resort with Allah in blissful eternity enjoying what would never perish, diminish or weaken.

In the second verse that follows (15), the same subject has been further cleared by saying:

قُلْ اَوْفَيْتُكُمْ بِحَبْرِ مِّنْ ذٰلِكُمْ لِلَّذِيْنَ اٰتَقُوا عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ حَبْنُ تَجَرِيْ مِنْ تَحْتِهَا
الْاَنْهَارُ خَالِدِيْنَ فِيْهَا وَاَزْوَاجٌ مُّطَهَّرَةٌ وَرِضْوَانٌ مِّنَ اللّٰهِ وَاللّٰهُ بِصِيْرٍ بِالْعِبَادِ

Say: "Shall I not tell you what is far better than that? For

those who fear Allah, there are with their Lord gardens beneath which rivers flow, where they shall live for ever, and wives purified, and approval from Allah. And Allah is watchful over His servants."

Here, the address is to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم who is being asked to tell those who become obsessed with imperfect and perishable blessings they find in the present life that he is in a position to lead them on to far better blessings. These shall be the lot of those who fear Allah and are obedient to Him. These blessings are, 'gardens beneath which rivers flow, wives purified and favours from Allah' - the last being the ultimate man can and should aspire for.

It will be recalled that in the preceding verse (14), the total count of blessings that infatuate man was given as six - women, children, heaps of gold and silver, fine horses, cattle and tillage. As compared to that, only three blessings of the Hereafter, that is, the gardens of Paradise, wives purified and the approval from Allah have been identified. Out of the rest, children were not mentioned because man loves children during his life in the world as children help and strengthen him in what he does and through them his name lives on. But, in the Hereafter he would not need such help, nor would he 'die' in which case he may have to look for an heir. Apart from this, whoever has children would have them all in the Paradise. Whoever has no children in the mortal world would, to begin with, just not have the desire to have them in the Paradise. Should someone desire that he may have children, Allah Almighty would bless him with children. According to a *ḥadīth* in *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhi*, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: 'If a dweller of Paradise wishes to have children, the process of pregnancy, birth and growth of the child will be completed in no time and he would have what he wished for.'

Similarly, gold and silver were not mentioned in relation to the Paradise because gold and silver are needed in the mortal world as material things are bought against them or anything else one needs can be procured through them. In the Hereafter, there will be just no need to buy anything or sell anything or pay for anything. Instead of that, whatever the dweller of Paradise needs will be instantly provided. Incidentally, the Paradise itself is not without gold and silver.

Some sayings of the Prophet ﷺ mention that some places of Paradise will have bricks of gold and silver masoned one after the other. However, in view of the uniqueness of that life, gold and silver were not considered worth mentioning.

Now the horses. In the world of our experience, horses help cover distances. In the other world, there is no travel and no riding but, sound *ḥadīth* reports do prove that fine horses will be presented before the dwellers of Paradise on Fridays which they will ride to go and meet friends and relatives. As is evident, horses were not worth mentioning in this context, which is also true about cattles and farms and their produce. The services they provide have already been provided in the Paradise by Allah Almighty without their medium.

However, should there be someone there who for some unnecessary reason wishes to try farming, he will have his wish granted. As it appears in some reports in al-Ṭabarānī, everything needed for farming will be assembled instantly for such a person. Thereafter the whole process of ploughing, seeding, ripening and cutting will be accomplished in no time and he will have what he wished for before him. So, among the blessings of the *Ākhirah*, the mention of 'wives purified' was considered sufficient because the Holy Qur'an has another promise for the people of Paradise: ﴿وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا مَنَازِلُ مُتَتَابِعَةٌ﴾ (And for them there is what they wish for). After such a comprehensive declaration, there remains no need to individually mention any particular blessing. Those that have been mentioned are blessings already there without any need to ask for these.

The last and most important blessing mentioned is the approval of Allah Almighty - something one cannot easily conceptualize - after which there is no danger of displeasure from Allah. According to a *ḥadīth*, when the people of Paradise would have settled down there, happy and content without having any desire remaining unfulfilled, Allah Almighty will speak to them asking if they are happy and if they need anything. They will say: Our Lord, You have given us everything, what else could we ever need. Allah Almighty would say: Now I give you the greatest of all blessings - you all have My approval that I will never be displeased with you, and nearness for ever.

Since the danger of Allah's displeasure does not exist in Paradise,

there is also no danger that the blessings of Paradise will ever be taken back or reduced.

It is the very subject of these verses that the Holy Prophet ﷺ has summarized in the following *ḥadīth*:

"الدنيا ملعونة و ملعون ما فيها إلا ما ابتغى به وجه الله" وفي رواية "إلا ذكر الله وما والاها أو عالماً أو متعلماً"

'Wordly life is cursed and cursed is what is in there, except what is used to seek the pleasure of Allah'. According to another narration: '... except the *Dhikr* (Remembrance) of Allah and what Allah likes and except 'Ālim (religious scholar) and Tālib 'ilm (student in religion).'

This *ḥadīth* has been reported by Ibn Mājah and al-Ṭabarānī on the authority of Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah رضى الله عنه .

Verses 18 - 19

شَهِدَ اللَّهُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَأُولُوا الْعِلْمِ قَائِمًا
بِالْقِسْطِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿١٨﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ عِنْدَ
اللَّهِ إِلَّا سَلَامٌ وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ
مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ بَعْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ
سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ ﴿١٩﴾

Allah bears witness that there is no god but He - and (so do) the angels and the men of knowledge - being the One who maintains equity. There is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise. [18]

Truly, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam. And those who have been given the Book did not differ (among themselves) except after the knowledge had come to them, (and all this) due to envy against each other. And whoever denies the verses of Allah, then, Allah is swift at reckoning. [19]

The subject of *Tauḥīd* (Oneness of Allah) which began with the opening of Sūrah 'Al-'Imrān reappears in the first verse in a very special manner. Out of the three witnesses mentioned here, the evidence

of Allah Almighty is in a figurative sense. It means that the being and the attributes of Allah and the manifestations of His power and creativity all over are open signs of His Oneness. Then there are the Messengers and Books sent by Allah, all confirming that truth. The second testimony mentioned is that of angels who are close to Allah. They carry out His instructions and bear testimony (knowing and seeing) that Allah alone is worthy of worship.

The third witness is that of the men of knowledge. This expression, *ulul-ʿilm*, means the blessed prophets and men who have the knowledge of Islam. Imām al-Ghazālī and Ibn Kathīr find this a matter of great honour for 'Ulamā for Allah has mentioned their witness along with His, and that of angels. It is also possible that the term, *ulul-ʿilm* (the men of knowledge) may, in an absolute sense, be referring to those who, by conducting an inquiry based on sound intellectual principles, or by deliberating into this universe, could acquire the knowledge of the unity of Allah Almighty - even if they are not 'ālim or 'men of knowledge' in the traditional sense, whose knowledge is acquired under a formal discipline from Islam's own original sources. The next verse (19) clearly settles that the only faith (*dīn*) acceptable to Allah is Islam. Thus, totally excluding any other faith or religion as acceptable to Allah, the verse completes the subject of Allah's Oneness, any opposition to which is doomed.

Related considerations

Merits of the verse meaning "Allah bears witness"

The verse beginning with **شَهِدَ اللَّهُ**: '*shahidal-lāhu*' has a special elegance. Imām al-Baghawī, the renowned *mufasssir* reports that two leading Jewish scholars came to Madinah from Syria. With the township of Madīnah before them, they started talking to each other about the looks of the place which matched the prophecy in Torah that the last of the prophets would be living here. Later, they came to know that someone very pious lives here and whom people refer to as the prophet. They went to see the Holy Prophet **صلى الله عليه وسلم**. Their very first sight of him reminded them of all attributes which Torah had predicted he would have. They presented themselves before him and said: "You are Muḥammad?" He said: "Yes." Again, they said: "You are Aḥmad?" He said: "Yes, I am Muḥammad, and Aḥmad." Then they said:

"We are going to ask you a question. If you answer it correctly, we shall embrace Islam." He said: "Go ahead and ask." They asked: "Which is the greatest witness in the Book of Allah?" This verse of '*shahādah*' (witness) was revealed as an answer to this question. He recited it for them. Both of them embraced Islam immediately.

According to a *ḥadīth* in the Musnad of Aḥmad, when the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم recited this verse in 'Arafat, he said right after that:

وَأَنَا عَلَى ذَلِكَ مِنَ الشَّاهِدِينَ يَا رَبِّ

And to that, O my Lord, I too am a witness. (Ibn Kathīr)

And a narration from Imām al-A'mash says: Whoever recites this verse and then says: وَأَنَا عَلَى ذَلِكَ مِنَ الشَّاهِدِينَ يَا رَبِّ (And to that, O my Lord, I too am a witness), Allah Almighty will say to the angels on the Last Day: 'My servant has made a promise while I am the Foremost to keep a promise when I make it, so let my servant be admitted into Paradise.' (Ibn Kathīr)

Another *ḥadīth* from Sayyidnā Abū Ayyub al-Anṣārī رضى الله عنه narrates that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: 'Whoever recites *Ayah al-Kursī* (2:255) and the *Ayah* شَهِدَ اللَّهُ : *Shahidal-lāhu* (3:18) and قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَالِكُ : *Qulil-lāhumma mālik al-mulki* upto يَغْفِرْ حِسَابًا : *bighairi ḥisāb* (3:26,27), Allah Almighty will forgive all his sins, admit him to Paradise and take care of seventy (i.e. plenty) of his needs, the simplest of these being his forgiveness.' (Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī with reference to Dailamī)

Dīn and Islam: An Explanation of the Two words:

The word, *Dīn* (دين) has more than one meaning in the Arabic language, one of them being 'the way'. In the terminology of the Qur'ān, the word, *Dīn* is used to stand for principles and injunctions which are common to all prophets from Sayyidnā Ādam عليه السلام to the last of the prophets, Sayyidnā Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā صلى الله عليه وسلم. The words, '*shari'ah*' (شرعة) or '*al-minḥāj*' (المنهاج) or the word, '*madhhab*' (مذهب) from among the later-day terms, are used to cover subsidiary injunctions, which have been different during different ages and different communities. The Holy Qur'ān says:

شَرَعَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الدِّينِ مَا وَصَّى بِهِ نُوحًا

Allah made you follow the same religion with which He bound

Nūḥ (and other prophets) - 42:13.

This tells us that the *dīn* of all our blessed prophets was one and the same, that is, belief in the most perfect Being and Attributes of Allah, in His being free of all shortcomings and that He alone is worthy of worship, believing in this from the depth of one's heart and confirming it verbally; belief in the Day of Judgement, in the final reckoning of deeds, the reward and the punishment and in Paradise and Hell and in every prophet and messenger sent by Him and in all commandments and injunctions brought by them, believing all this in one's heart and confirming such belief verbally as well.

Now the real meaning of the word, *Islam* is to submit oneself to Allah and be obedient to His commands. Given this meaning, those who believed in the prophets and messengers of their time and were obedient to the commands of Allah they brought to them, were all entitled to be called Muslims, and their religion was Islam. It was in this sense of the word that Sayyidnā Nūḥ said: وَأُمرْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ (I have been commanded that I be from among the Muslims - 10:72) and therefore, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام described himself and his community as Muslims when he said: رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمِينَ لَكَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُسْلِمَةً لَكَ (Our Lord, make us Muslims, the submitting ones to Thee, and from our progeny a community of Muslims submitting to Thee - 2:128). And it was in this very sense of the word that the disciples of Sayyidnā 'Isā عليه السلام said: وَاشْهَدُوا بِنَا مُسْلِمُونَ (And bear witness that we are Muslims - 3:52)

Sometimes this word is applied particularly to the *dīn* and *sharī'ah*, the religion and the law brought finally by the last among the prophets, Sayyidnā Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā صلى الله عليه وسلم. This law abrogated all previous ways in religion and this shall sustain right through the Day of Judgment. Given this meaning of the word *Islam*, it becomes particular to the religion brought by the prophet of Islam and to the large community of his followers. In a well-known *ḥadīth* of Jibrā'īl, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has explained Islam in this very manner.

The word, 'Al-Islam' as it appears in the verse here carries the likelihood of both meanings. If the first meaning is taken, it would mean that the only religion acceptable with Allah is Islam, that is, becoming obedient in complete submission to the commands of Allah, believing

in all prophets of all times and in whatever commandments they brought, by acting accordingly. Although, the religion brought by Ḥaḍrat Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم has not been specially identified here, yet, in pursuance of the general rule, once the last among the line of prophets had been sent, the belief and practice of all injunctions he brought becomes binding, and inclusive under this rule. As such, the outcome will be that the religion acceptable during the period of Sayyidnā Nūḥ was what he brought; during the period of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm, what he brought. Similarly, the Islam of the period of Sayyidnā Mūsā was what came in the form of the tablets of Torah and the teachings of Moses and the Islam of the period of Sayyidnā 'Īsā was what came as Injīl and the teachings of Jesus, عليهم السلام. At the end of this chain of prophets, the Islam of the period of Sayyidnā Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم, the last among the prophets, shall be what took shape on the pattern given by the Qur'ān and Sunnah.

Now if we take the second meaning of *Islam*, that is, the Shari'ah the way and law brought by the last of the prophets صلى الله عليه وسلم, the verse would come to mean that in this period of time only that religion of Islam which is true to the teachings of the noble prophet ﷺ is the one acceptable. No doubt, previous religions too, during their age of currency, were known as Islam, but they are now abrogated. So, the end-result is the same both ways, that is, during the age of every prophet, the religion acceptable in the sight of Allah is that particular Islam which conforms to the revelation and teachings credited to that prophet. No religion, other than this, even if it be a previously abrogated one, is acceptable and certainly not deserving of being called "Islam" at a later stage. The Shari'ah of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm was the Islam of his times. When the time of Sayyidnā Mūsā came, the abrogated laws of that code did not remain the Islam of his time. Similarly, any laws of Moses abrogated during the time of Sayyidnā 'Īsā were not to be labelled as Islam any more. It is exactly like this when laws and injunctions of previous religious codes were abrogated during the time of the Last of the prophets ﷺ, they no more remained valid as Islam. Therefore, whatever meaning of Islam is taken, general or particular, in relation to the community being addressed by the Holy Qur'ān, the outcome of both is nothing but that, following the appearance of the noble Prophet ﷺ, the only religion which shall be deserving of the

name, *Islam*, will be the one that conforms to the Qur'ān and the teachings of the blessed recipient of revelations and that alone shall be acceptable in the sight of Allah. Since no other religion is acceptable to Allah, it cannot become a source of salvation either. This subject has appeared in the Holy Qur'ān in many verses separately. The exact words used in one such verse are: وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ that is, whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him (and what is done under its dictates shall be wasted).

Salvation in our times depends on Islam:

Even good deeds and morals from a non-Muslim are not acceptable.

These verses have very clearly hit at the root of the atheistic approach which endeavours to bracket Islam and disbelief (*kufr*) on the same footing in the name of tolerance preached by Islam, thereby claiming that every faith of the world - Judaism, Christianity, even paganism - can each become the source of salvation, on condition that its followers perform good deeds and observe good morals. This, in reality is a veiled attempt to demolish a principle of Islam and to prove that Islam is nothing of substance. It is something limpid and imaginary which could be moulded to fit into whatever religion one chooses, even if it is *kufr* or disbelief! The verses of the Holy Qur'ān, those appearing here and a large number of others, have very explicitly stressed that the light and darkness cannot be the same. Similarly, it is grossly absurd and impossible that Allah would like disobedience to and rebellion against Him just as He likes obedience and submission. Whoever denies even one basic principle of Islam, he is, without any shadow of doubt, a rebel to Allah and the enemy of His Messengers, no matter how impressing he may appear in his other deeds and formal morality. Salvation in the Hereafter depends, first of all, on obedience to Allah and His Messenger. Whoever remains deprived of it, not one of his deeds is credible. The Holy Qur'ān says for such people:

فَلَا تُقِيمُ لَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَزَنًا

We shall not assign weight to their deeds on the Day of Judgment - 18:105.

In verse 19: وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ الَّذِينَ أُولُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا أَمِنَ بَعْدَ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ بَعْثًا يَبْتِغِيهِمْ after declaring that 'the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam', the text moves on

to explain why the people of the Book went about disputing the prophethood of Sayyidnā Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم and challenging Islam as false. They did this, not because they had any doubts in this connection for they knew the truth of the matter through their own scriptures, but because they were scared of losing their ground against Muslims. So, it was their malice towards Muslims, their love for power and influence and their arrogant self-image as traditional leaders which drove them to these altercations.

Finally, it was said: وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ that is, 'whoever denies the verses of Allah (as the people of the Book did), then, Allah is swift at reckoning'. The swiftness of this reckoning can be well imagined as it starts initially soon after death when man passes into the state known as 'barzakh'. But the detailed accounting for one's deeds shall take place on the Day of Judgement when he will have to account for his doings in the minutest detail. Then, the penchant for disputing truth will be exposed. The people who denied the truth will discover their worth and the punishment it calls for shall become known to them.

Verse 20

فَإِنْ حَاجُّوكَ فَقُلْ أَسْلَمْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلَّهِ وَمَنِ اتَّبَعَنِ وَقُلْ لِلَّذِينَ
أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَالْأُمِّيِّينَ أَأَسْلَمْتُمْ فَإِنْ أَسْلَمُوا فَقَدِ اهْتَدَوْا
وَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا عَلَيْكَ الْبَلْغُ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِالْعِبَادِ ﴿٢٠﴾

Then, if they argue with you, say: "I have submitted myself to Allah, and (so did) those who have followed me." And say to those who have been given the Book, and to the unlettered: "Do you submit?" If they submit, they will be on the right path. And if they turn back, then you have only to convey. And Allah is watchful over His servants. [20]

The Sūrah began with the confirmation of Divine Oneness and the refutation of Trinity. Answered here are argumentations in which the disbelievers and deniers among the people of the Book persist - even after the truth of Islam has been proved conclusively. The advice against such ongoing and unnecessary disputations is that the acceptance or rejection of disputers should be of no use to a believer who

simply has to declare that he and those with him have entered the fold of Islam being in no doubt about its truth. The Holy Prophet ﷺ was entrusted with the mission of calling the people of the Book, the Jews and Christians, and the disbelievers of Arabia to submit to Allah and embrace Islam which will be for their own good for they will be on the right path. In case they continue to maintain their hostile attitude, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been comforted here by saying that his duty is only limited to conveying the message of Allah and His commandments. That the message does not seem to get across to them, as they elect to reject rather than accept, should really not be a matter of concern for him. This is something Allah will take care of in His own way for He is in full sight of what His servants are doing.

Verses 21 - 22

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَيَقْتُلُونَ النَّبِينَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ
وَيَقْتُلُونَ الَّذِينَ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْقِسْطِ مِنَ النَّاسِ ۖ فَبِشْرِهِمْ بِعَذَابٍ
أَلِيمٍ ﴿٢١﴾ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ
وَمَالَهُمْ مِنْ نَاصِرِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾

Surely, those who disbelieve the verses of Allah and slay the prophets unjustly and, from people, slay those who bid justice, to them give tidings of a painful punishment. [21] Those are the ones whose deeds have gone waste in this world, and in the Hereafter, and for them there are no helpers. [22]

In the earlier part of the Sūrah, the text mostly beamed at the Christians. In verse 20, 'those who have been given the Book' includes both Christians and Jews. Now, verses 21-22 here, talk about some of the unusual doings of Jews. Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī while commenting on this verse reports a *ḥadīth* from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم as narrated by Ibn Abī Ḥatīm. While explaining this verse, he said that Banī Isrā'īl slew forty three prophets at one and the same time. One hundred and seventy pious elders stood up asking them to uphold justice. They slew them as well on the same day. (Bayān al-Qur'ān)

In verse 21, 'those who disbelieve the verses of Allah' refers to Jews who did not believe in the Injīl and the Qur'ān. 'Slay the prophets

unjustly' means that they know that they are doing so without justice. 'Those who bid justice' are people who teach moderation in deeds and morals.

Because of this whole set of their terrible deeds, verse 22 says that all their good deeds have gone waste both here and there, and when they are punished, they will find no one to assist them.

Verses 23 - 25

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا نَصِيبًا مِّنَ الْكِتَابِ يُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى كِتَابِ
 اللَّهِ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ يَتَوَلَّى فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُمْ وَهُمْ مُّعْرِضُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾
 ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا لَن نَّمَسَّنَا النَّارَ إِلَّا أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ ۚ وَغَرَّهُمْ
 فِي دِينِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَفْتَرُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾ فَكَيْفَ إِذَا جُمِعْتُمْ لِيَوْمِ
 لَارٍ رَبِّ فِيهِ ۖ وَوُفِّيَتْ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

﴿٢٥﴾

Did you not see those who have been given a share from the Book? They are invited to the Book of Allah in order that it may decide between them. Then, a group from them goes back turning their faces away. [23] That is because they have said: "The Fire shall not touch us except for a few days." And deceived they are in their faith by what they have been forging. [24] Then, how (will it be) when We gather them on a day in which there is no doubt, and everybody will be paid, in full, for what he has earned. And they shall not be wronged.[25]

While dealing with the subject of Jews, as in verses 21-22, the text goes on to censure a particular claim of theirs in the present verse. The address is to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and the reference is to the Torah given to the Jews who would have found it enough for them if they were really looking forward to guidance. But they elect to be indifferent because they say and believe that the fire of Hell will not touch them except for a few days, after which, according to their supposition, they would be forgiven. This, it has been said, is self-deception caused by what they have been forging for themselves like

their belief that they were the progeny of prophets and therefore, they will escape punishment in the fire of Hell.

Jews contended that they had worshipped the calf for 40 days and so they will incur punishment, if any, for the same period only.

Verses 26 - 27

قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَلِكُ الْمَلِكِ تُؤْتِي الْمَلِكَ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتَنْزِعُ الْمَلِكَ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُعِزُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ بِيَدِكَ الْخَيْرُ إِنَّكَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٦﴾ تُؤَلِّجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَتُؤَلِّجُ النَّهَارَ فِي اللَّيْلِ وَتُخْرِجُ الْحَيَّ مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ وَتُخْرِجُ الْمَيِّتَ مِنَ الْحَيِّ وَتَرْزُقُ مَنْ تَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿٢٧﴾

Say: "O Allah, O Lord of the Kingdom, You give kingdom to whom You will, and take kingdom away from whom You will; and You bestow honour on whom You will, and bring disgrace to whom You will. In your hand lies the good. You are surely powerful over everything. [26] You make the night enter into the day, and make the day enter into the night; and You bring the living out from the dead, and bring the dead out from the living, and You give to whom You will without measure." [27]

In these verses, Muslims have been taught and prompted to make a particular prayer which, in a subtle way, gives an indication that they are going to overpower disbelievers. This has its proof in the background in which these verses were revealed. When the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم promised that Byzantine and Persia will be taken, the hypocrites and the Jews laughed at the idea. Thereupon, this verse was revealed. ¹

Commentary

The background of Revelation:

An episode from the Battle of Khandaq

The recurring defeat of the disbelievers of Makkah at Badr and Uhud and their general failure to register any gains in their hostility

1. Ruḥ al-Ma'ānī from al-Waḥidī, from Ibn 'Abbās and Anas رضي الله عنهما

against Muslims coupled with the growing strength of Muslims and the rise of Islam had made them very nervous, almost reckless. The whole thing ended up in a conspiracy. The disbelievers of Arabia, the Jews and the Christians all joined in a united front against Muslims and resolved to attack Madīnah and fight a conclusive battle. This they did, determined to eradicate Islam and Muslims from the face of the earth. The battle is called 'al-Aḥzāb' in the Qur'ān, and 'Khandaq' in history, because the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had decided in consultation with his Companions that a *khandaq* or trench be dug around parts of Madīnah to block the unhindered attack of the enemy during this battle.

According to narrations in al-Baihaqī, Abū Nu'aim and Ibn Khuzaimah, when the task of digging the trench was entrusted to the Islamic army, the plan was to allot the digging of a forty hand-span long trench to a group of ten men each. This trench was several miles long and fairly deep and wide, so that the enemy would find it impossible to cross over. Then, the digging had to be completed in the shortest possible time which made the noble Companions put in whatever time and energy they had in this effort, so much so that they found it difficult to leave the job and take time for even the most pressing of their needs. They were working non-stop on hungry stomachs. Surely, a modern army engineering service with its latest equipment would have not found this kind of job any easier to handle. Here, it was the power of faith which made the completion of this difficult assignment possible.

The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was taking part in this digging operation as an individual like everybody else. By chance, the diggers came upon a huge rock in a certain part of the trench. Those who were assigned to dig that part of the trench tried their best to break it apart but they became helpless and gave up. They asked Sayyidnā Salīm al-Fārisī رضى الله عنه to go to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, tell him about the problem and seek his instructions in this connection. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم immediately came at the spot, took the pickaxe in his blessed hands and struck at the rock. The rock was shattered into pieces and from it rose a streak of light which illuminated the area far and wide. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: 'In this light, I see the palaces and buildings of Hirah in the country of Persia.

He struck again and a second beam of light rose. He said: 'In this light, I was shown the red palaces and buildings of the Byzantines.' When he struck the third time and the flame beamed its light around, he said: 'In this I was shown the great palaces of San'ā in Yemen.' Then, he said: 'I share the good news given by Jibrā'il with you that my community of Muslims will prevail over all these countries.'

When the hypocrites of Madīnah heard about it, they found an occasion to ridicule Muslims - 'just look at these people, here they are all scared of the enemy, digging trenches without eating and resting, not knowing for sure if their own lives will be safe, yet they are dreaming of running over Persia, Byzantine and Yemen!' It was in answer to a people so unfair and unjust that Allah Almighty revealed the verse:

قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَا لَكَ الْمُلْكُ تُؤْتِي الْمُلْكَ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتَنْزِعُ الْمُلْكَ مِمَّنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُعِزُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ ۚ بِيَدِكَ الْخَيْرُ ۖ إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

Say: "O Allah, O Lord of the Kingdom, You give kingdom to whom You will, and take kingdom away from whom You will; and You bestow honour on whom You will, and bring disgrace to whom You will. In Your hand lies the good. You are surely powerful over everything." (3 : 26)

Appearing in the form of a prayer, this verse so eloquently brings into focus the most perfect power of Allah as it manifests itself in the rise and fall of nations and in the revolutions that rock countries. At the same time it gives a hint that the prophecy made by the Holy Prophet ﷺ will come to pass and Persia and Byzantine will fall to Muslims. Here, enemies of Islam have been warned that they have not learnt their lesson from the rise and fall of past wielders of power for they judge events and personalities from the material angle while the truth is that all powers and governments of the world are in the hands of the most pristine power of Allah, the One in whose hands lies all honour and disgrace. There is no doubt that He is capable of making the poor and the meek sit on thrones and wrest power from kings and monarchs. Why then, should it be difficult for him to choose these ragged believers digging trenches to rule over Persia, Syria, Iraq and Yemen?

Things usually considered bad may ultimately prove not to be that bad:

Towards the end of the verse, the expression *بِيَدِكَ الْخَيْرُ* translated as

'in Your hand lies the good' needs some explanation. It will be noticed that in the earlier part of the verse both giving and taking of power and bestowing of honour and bringing of disgrace were mentioned side by side. It would have seemed in keeping with the occasion if the word, '*sharr*' (evil) would have been coupled with '*khair*' (good). But, the text elects to use the word, '*khair*' (good) alone and thereby points out to something real and significant in human affairs. The point worth noting is that a person or a people may regard something as unwelcome, and it may even be so for that particular person or people, but looked at from the wider angle of the whole community of nations, it may not be really evil. The Arab poet, *Mutanabbi* has put it very succinctly when he said:

مَصَائِبُ قَوْمٍ عِنْدَ قَوْمٍ فَوَائِدُ

The calamities of one group are the gains of another.

In short, the evil of things we regard as evil is partial. Looked at from its relationship to the Creator of the Universe and the Lord of all there is, and viewed in the perspective of the totality of the world of our experience, nothing is really evil or bad as such. So given the wisdom, the power and the consideration of the created universe as a whole, everything is good, '*khair*' as the verse sees sufficient to say.

The second verse (27) demonstrates that Allah controls all spaces and heavenly bodies and employs the sun and the moon to make the days longer than nights and the nights longer than the days at His will and command.

Mentioned after that is His unrivalled power of 'bringing the living out from the dead' such as, a chick from an egg, or a human infant from the sperm, or a tree from a seed and of 'bringing the dead out from the living' such as eggs from birds and beasts, sperm from humans or fruit from trees and dried grain from plants.

If we were to take 'the living' and 'the dead' in a broad and general sense, this will become inclusive of the learned and the ignorant, the perfect and the imperfect and the believer and the disbeliever (the Muslim and the *Kāfir*). It only goes to show that Allah's perfect power exercises absolute control over all phenomena, both physical and spiritual, through which He can make a Muslim out of a *Kāfir*, a perfect

believer out of a staunch disbeliever, a scholar out of an ignorant person - if He so wills. And if He so wills, He can let a believer turn into a disbeliever or a rustic into a scholar. He brought Ibrāhīm out of an idol-worshipper. He let the son of Prophet Nūḥ remain an infidel. Strange but true, the son of an 'ālim (scholar) can remain illiterate and the son of someone illiterate can become an 'ālim.

A discerning reader will not fail to notice the eloquent order in which Allah's most perfect power that reigns and runs the universe from the cosmos to the soul of man has been demonstrated so effectively.

The special merit of this verse:

Imām al-Baghawī reports a *ḥadīth* from the Holy Prophet ﷺ in which he said: It is Allah's promise that anyone who recites, after every Ṣalāh, the Sūrah al-Fatīḥah, Āyah al-Kursī, two verses of 'Āl-'Imrān, that is *قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَالِكُ الْمُلْكِ* (2:18) and the present verse from *يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الْكَافِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ* (26-27), He will make his abode in Paradise, and have him placed in the Sacred Enclosure, and bless him with His mercy seventy times every day, and fulfil seventy of his needs, and protect him against every envier and enemy and make him prevail over them.

Verses 28 - 30

لَا يَتَّخِذِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الْكَافِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَلَيْسَ مِنَ اللَّهِ فِي شَيْءٍ إِلَّا أَنْ تَتَّقُوا مِنْهُمْ تُقَاةً وَيُحَذِّرْكُمْ اللَّهُ نَفْسَهُ ۖ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٢٨﴾ قُلْ إِنْ تَخَفُوا مَا فِي صُدُورِكُمْ أَوْ تُبْدُوهُ يُعَلِّمُهُ اللَّهُ وَيَعْلَمَ مَا فِي السَّمُوتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ۖ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٩﴾ يَوْمَ تَجِدُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ مُحْضَرًا ۖ وَمَا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ سُوءٍ تَوَدُّ لَوْ أَنَّ بَيْنَهَا وَبَيْنَهُ أَمَدًا ۖ بَعِيدًا ۖ وَيُحَذِّرُكُمْ اللَّهُ نَفْسَهُ ۖ وَاللَّهُ رَءُوفٌ بِالْعِبَادِ ﴿٣٠﴾

The believers must not take the disbelievers as friends instead of the believers. And whoever does that has no relation with Allah whatsoever, unless you guard

yourselves against an apprehension from them. And Allah warns you of Himself and to Allah is the return. [28] Say: "Whether you conceal what is in your hearts or reveal it, Allah will know it." And He knows what is in the heavens and what is in the earth. And Allah is powerful over everything. [29] On the day, when everybody shall find brought before him whatever good he did and whatever evil he did, he will wish that there were a long distance between him and that (day). And Allah warns you of Himself. And Allah is compassionate to (His) servants. [30]

Commentary

In these verses, Muslims have been instructed not to take disbelievers as their friends. Those who act against this instruction have been sternly warned: Those who take them as friends will find that their bond of love and friendship with Allah has been cut off. Any emotionally involved friendship that comes from the heart is absolutely forbidden (*Harām*). However, a formal friendship at the level of mutual dealings is, no doubt, permissible; but, that too is not favoured if unnecessary.

Verses dealing with this subject have appeared at many places in the Holy Qur'an with varying shades of meaning. It was said in Sūrah al-Mumtahinah:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا عَدُوِّي وَعَدُوَّكُمْ أَوْلِيَاءَ تُلْقُونَ إِلَيْهِم بِالْمَوَدَّةِ،

O those who believe, do not take My enemy and your enemy as friends having love for them. (60:1)

Then, towards the end it was said:

وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْهُ مِنْكُمْ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ سَوَاءَ السَّبِيلِ

And whoever from among you does this he has gone astray from the right path. (60:1)

Elsewhere it was said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالنَّصَارَى أَوْلِيَاءَ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ مِنْكُمْ فَإِنَّهُ مِنْهُمْ

O those who believe, do not take Jews or Christians as friends (for) they are friends among themselves. And whoever has friendship with them, he is one of them. (5:51)

And it appears in Sūrah al-Mujādalah:

لَا تَجِدُ قَوْمًا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ يُوَادُّونَ مَنْ حَادَّ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَلَوْ
كَانُوا آبَاءَهُمْ أَوْ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ أَوْ إِخْوَانَهُمْ أَوْ عَشِيرَتَهُمْ

You shall not find those who believe in Allah and in the Hereafter having friendship with those who have enmity with Allah and His messenger, even though they may be their fathers or sons or brothers or members of their tribe. (58:22)

Relations with disbelievers

In verses cited above and in many other verses of the Holy Qur'ān, Muslims have been strongly prevented from '*Muwalāt*' with non-Muslims, that is, from indulging in relations based on love and friendship. Looking at these clear instructions, non-Muslims who are not aware of the true intention and application of this rule start thinking that the religion of Muslims does not seem to have any place for toleration or bilateral relations or even common courtesy.

On the other hand, there are a large number of verses from the Holy Qur'ān, the words and acts of the noble Prophet ﷺ, the practice of the rightly-guided *Khulafā'* and other revered Companions, which bring to light injunctions and actual modes of dealing with non-Muslims by way of favour, compassion, generosity, sympathy and concern, which has little or no parallel in world history. A superficial look on these different attitudes may sense a sort of contradiction therein. But, this feeling is a result of only a cursory study of the true teachings of the Qur'ān. If we collect all verses of the Qur'ān, relating to this subject which appear at several different places and study them all together, we shall find nothing which could bother non-Muslims nor shall there remain any doubt of contradiction in the text of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth. With this need in view, given below is a full explanation of this point which will, hopefully, bring forth the distinction between various shades of friendship and the reality behind each of them. In addition to this, we shall also get to know what levels of friendship are permissible or impermissible and also the reasons why a certain level has been disallowed.

The truth of the matter is that there are different degrees or steps or levels in relations between two persons or groups. The first degree

of such relations comes from the heart, that of affection and love involving intense emotional commitment. This is called *Muwālāt* or close friendship. This sort of friendship is restricted to true Muslims. A Muslim is not permitted to have this kind of relationship with a non-Muslim.

The second degree is that of *Muwasāt*, which means relationship based on sympathy, kindness and concern. It includes charitable help and support, condolence and consolation and any well-meaning attitude of wishing well. Barring disbelievers who are at war with Muslims, this kind of relationship is permissible with all other non-Muslims. A detailed explanation of this approach has appeared in Sūrah al-Mumtahinah (60:8) :

لَا يَنْهٰكُمُ اللّٰهُ عَنِ الدِّينِ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِى الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوْكُمْ مِّنْ دِيَارِكُمْ اَنْ تَبَرُّوْهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوْا اِلَيْهِمْ

Allah does not forbid you from treating those who do not fight you on your faith, nor have they driven you out of your homes, with benevolence and equity.

The third degree is that of *Mudārāt* which means relations based on customary cordiality, adequacy in courtesy, pleasant and friendly behaviour and mannerly politeness. This too is permissible with all non-Muslims, specially so, when the objective is to present them with some beneficial aspect of the Faith, or when they are guests, or the purpose is to stay safe from any possible harm coming through them. The words, *إِلَّا اَنْ تَقْرَءُوْا مِنْهُمْ نِفَاً* (unless you guard yourselves against an apprehension from them) appearing in this verse mean this degree of *Mudārāt* which, in other words, means that *Muwālāt* or friendship with disbelievers is not permissible except when you are in a situation where you want to defend yourself against them. Since *Mudārāt* or sympathetic relations somewhat resemble *Muwālāt* or friendship, it was exempted from the category of *Muwālāt* . (Bayān al-Qur'ān)

The fourth degree is that of *Mu'āmalāt* or dealings. It means dealings and transactions in business or employment or wages or industry or technology. These too are permissible with non-Muslims, except when such dealings harm the general body of Muslims. The continued practice of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم , the rightly-guided *Khulafā'*

and other Companions prove it so. It is on this basis that Muslim jurists have prohibited the sale of arms to disbelievers who are at war with Muslims. However, trade and activities allied to it have been permitted. Also allowed is having them as employees or being employed in their plants and institutions.

To sum up, as for the four degrees of relations with non-Muslims, we now know that friendship which binds a Muslim in very close ties with non-Muslims is not permissible under any condition. Relations based on benevolence, humane interest and concern are permitted with all but the belligerent ones. Similarly, politeness and friendly treatment is also permissible when the purpose is to entertain a guest, convey Islamic teachings to non-Muslims or to stay safe against being hurt or harmed by them.

Now, let us look at what our noble Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, who graced this world as the universal mercy, did for non-Muslims. He demonstrated such compassion, generosity and politeness while dealing with them that it would be difficult to find its example in the world history. When Makkah was in the grip of famine, he personally went out to help his enemies who had made him leave his home town. Then, came the conquest of Makkah. All these enemies fell under his power and control. He set all of them free saying: لَا تَنْتَرِبُ عَلَيْكُمُ الْيَوْمَ which means - 'Not only that you are being given amnesty this day, we are not censuring you at all for your past tyranny against us either.' When non-Muslim prisoners of war were presented before him, he treated them with such tenderness which many cannot claim to have done even in respect of their children. The disbelievers inflicted on him all sorts of injuries and pain but he never raised his hand in revenge. He did not even wish ill of them. A delegation from the tribe of Banū Thaḳīf who had not embraced Islam upto that time came to visit him. They were given the honour of staying in the Mosque of the Prophet, a place regarded by Muslims as most honourable.

Sayyidnā 'Umar رضى الله عنه gave stipends and allowances to needy non-Muslim *dhimmīs*, an elegant conduct the examples of which are spread all over in the accounts of dealings credited to the rightly-guided *Khulafā'* and the noble Companions. Let us bear in mind that all these were in one or the other form of *Mu'wāsāt* (concern)

or *Mudārāt* (cordiality) or *Mu'āmalāt* (dealings). It had nothing to do with *Muwālāt* or close and intimate friendship which had been forbidden.

The aforesaid explanations clarify two things: firstly, Islam teaches its adherents all possible tolerance, decency and benevolence while dealing with non-Muslims; secondly, the superficial contradiction sensed with regard to the verse forbidding friendship with non-Muslims stands removed.

However, there is a possible question which still remains unanswered. The question is: 'Why has the Qur'ān chosen to so strongly block close friendship with disbelievers, so much so that it has not allowed it in favour of any disbeliever under any condition? What is the wisdom behind it? One of the reasons, a particular one, is that Islam does not see man existing in this world like common animals or jungle trees and blades of grass which sprout, grow, flourish and die and that is the end of it. Instead of that, man's life in this world is a purposeful life. All stages and phases of his life, that is, his eating, drinking, standing, sitting, sleeping, waking, even his living and dying, all revolve around a central purpose. As long as what he does conforms to this purpose, all he does is correct and sound. If these are against that purpose, then, they are all wrong. The poet-sage Rūmī said it so well:

زندگی از بهر ذکر و بندگی ست
 بے عبادت زندگی شرمندگی ست

The purpose of life is to remember the Creator and serve Him well

Life without that devotion is nothing but shame

In his view and in the view of all right-minded people, when man abandons this purpose, he does not remain the human being he was created to be:

آنچه می بینی خلاف آدم اند
 نیستند آدم غلاف آدم اند

What you see is a crowd of anti-men

They are not men, they are just the shell of men

The Holy Qur'ān has made human beings declare this purpose as their solemn creed in the following words: قُلْ إِن صَلَّيْتُمْ وَنُكِسْتُمُ

(My prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are all for Allah, the Lord of the Worlds." (6:162)

Now, when it stands established that the purpose of man's life is to obey and worship Allah, the Lord of the worlds, everything else including all affairs of life in this world -- business, government, politics, personal and social relations -- must invariably follow this purpose. It follows, therefore, that those who are against this purpose are the worst enemies of man. Since Satan is the foremost in this enmity, the Holy Qur'an says: إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ عَدُوًّا. (Surely, Satan is your enemy, so take him as enemy. 35:6).

Thus, those who follow the alluring dictates of the Satan and oppose the injunctions of Allah brought by the blessed prophets عليهم السلام can hardly be the kind of people to deserve deep love and friendship based on close ties and any degree of intimacy. It is just not possible for a person who has a definite purpose in life, and who has all his friendships and enmities, agreements and disagreements subservient to this central purpose, to do something like this. The same subject has been stated in a *hadīth* from al-Bukhārī and Muslim in which the Holy Prophet ﷺ has been reported to have said: مَنْ أَحَبَّ لِلَّهِ وَأَبْغَضَ لِلَّهِ فَقَدْ اكْتَمَلَ (Whoever loves for the sake of Allah and hates for the sake of Allah alone, has perfected his faith) (Bukhārī and Muslim). From here we know that 'Imān or faith remains incomplete unless man subordinates his love and friendship and his hatred and enmity to Allah Almighty. Therefore, any deep emotional commitment by a true Muslim in the known forms of love and friendship has to be exclusively for one who is with him all the way in the pursuit of this noble purpose and certainly obedient to what his Lord has commanded him to do. This is why the Holy Qur'an has, in verses cited at the beginning of the commentary, said that the one who maintains relations based on deep love and friendship with disbelievers is one of them.

The last verse (30) says that 'Allah warns you of Himself' lest you should indulge in friendship with disbelievers for the sake of fleeting interests and objectives and thus invite the anger of Allah. And since close friendship (*Muwalāt*) relates to the heart and the affairs of the heart are known to none but Allah, it is possible that a person may actually be intensely in love for and friendship with disbelievers, but

may deny it verbally. Therefore, the earlier verse (29) has already covered it by saying: "whether you conceal what is in your hearts, or disclose it, Allah shall know it." No denial or false claim is tenable before Him.

Verses 31 - 32

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ
 ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٣١﴾ قُلْ أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ
 فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْكُفْرِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

Say (O Prophet): "If you do love Allah, follow me; Allah shall love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Most-Forgiving, Very-Merciful." [31]

Say: "Obey Allah and the Messenger." Then, should they turn back, Allah does not love the disbelievers." [32]

Sequence

In previous verses, there was affirmation of Allah's Oneness and the condemnation of disbelief in it. Affirmed now is the belief in prophethood as well as the necessity of following the Messenger so that we stand informed that the rejection of prophethood or refusal to obey the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is also an act of disbelief (*kufr*) like the rejection of the Oneness of Allah.

Commentary

Love is something secret. Whether or not a person loves another person, or loves less or more, are questions which cannot be answered precisely. There is no measure or yard-stick to determine the truth of the matter except that one makes an educated guess based on visible conditions and dealings, for love leaves traces and signs which could help in recognizing it as such. Now, in these verses, Allah Almighty tells those who claimed that they loved Allah and hoped to be loved by Him above the real criterion of His love. In other words, if a person living in the world of today claims that he loves his Creator and Master, then, he must test it on the touch-stone of his obedience to the Messenger, that is, match it against the frequency and quality of where and how he has been following him. Once this is done, the genuine and the fake of it will be exposed right there. How much true a person

turns out to be in his claim will be visible from how much he makes it a point to follow the noble prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, using the guidance brought by him as the guiding force in his life. The same test will show that the weaker a person is in his claim, so equally weak he shall be in his obedience to the prophet.

The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said:

He who obeyed Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم obeyed Allah and he who disobeyed Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم disobeyed Allah. (Tafsīr Maẓharī, v.2)

Verses 33 - 34

إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ آدَمَ وَنُوحًا وَآلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَآلَ عِصْرَ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾ ذُرِّيَّةً بَعْضُهَا مِنْ بَعْضٍ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

Verily, Allah has chosen Ādam and Nūḥ and the House of Ibrāhīm and the House of 'Imrān over the worlds, [33] some of them being a progeny of the others. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. [34]

In these verses a reference has been made to some past prophets to comfort the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم since disbelievers did not obey him because they doubted his prophethood. It is for their guidance that names of some past prophets have been cited to help remove such doubts. However, these prophets have been referred to very briefly as the main purpose is to mention Sayyidnā 'Isā عليه السلام which follows immediately because he will come again to this world and will work with the followers of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, therefore, it is necessary for the Muslims to know his identification.

Verses 35 - 36

إِذْ قَالَتِ امْرَأَتُ عِصْرَ رَبِّ إِنِّي نَذَرْتُ لَكَ مَا فِي بَطْنِي مُحَرَّرًا فَتَقَبَّلْ مِنِّي ۖ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٣٥﴾ فَلَمَّا وَضَعَتْهَا قَالَتْ رَبِّ إِنِّي وَضَعْتُهَا أُنْثَىٰ ۖ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا وَضَعْتَ ۖ وَلَيْسَ الذَّكَرُ كَالْأُنْثَىٰ ۖ وَإِنِّي سَمَّيْتُهَا مَرْيَمَ وَإِنِّي

﴿٣٦﴾ اَعِزُّهَا بِكَ وَذَرِّتَهَا مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ

When 'Imran's wife said: "O my Lord, I have vowed what is in my womb to be exclusively for You. So, accept (it) from me. You, certainly You, are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing." [35]

So, when she delivered her, she said: "O my Lord, I have delivered her, a female child" - and Allah knows better what she has delivered, and the male is not like the female - "and I have named her Maryam, and I place her and her progeny under Your shelter against Satan, the rejected." [36]

Commentary:

In the religious code of earlier prophets, there was a method of worship through which a child, out of one's children, could be freed from all worldly services and devoted exclusively for Allah. Following this practice, the mother of Sayyidah Maryam made a vow during her pregnancy that she would let the newborn serve Baitul-Maqdis in the way of Allah and that she would not put the child on worldly chores. Sayyidah Maryam's mother thought that she will deliver a male child. But, when she delivered a girl, she was full of remorse thinking that a girl would not be able to do this duty. But Allah Almighty, out of His consideration for the sincerity of Sayyidah Maryam's mother, accepted that very girl and thereby made her status distinct from any other girl of the world.

From here we learn that a mother holds a certain measure of guardianship over her child in respect of his or her education and training, for Sayyidah Maryam's mother would have never vowed if the mother had no right of guardianship over her child. Similarly, it proves that a mother too has the right to give a name to her child. (al-Jassās)

Verse 37

فَتَقَبَّلَهَا رَبُّهَا بِقَبُولٍ حَسَنٍ وَأَنْبَتَهَا نَبَاتًا حَسَنًا وَكَفَّلَهَا زَكَرِيَّا كُلَّمَا دَخَلَ عَلَيْهَا زَكَرِيَّا الْمِحْرَابَ وَجَدَ عِنْدَهَا رِزْقًا قَالَ يَمْرِئُؤُنَى لَكَ هَذَا قَالَ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ إِنْ أَلَّاهُ يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿٣٧﴾

So, her Lord accepted her, a good acceptance, and made her grow, a good growth, and made Zakariyya her guardian. Whenever Zakariyya visited her in the Arch, he found with her some food. He said: "Maryam, from where has it come for you?" She said: "It is from Allah. Surely, Allah gives whom He wills without measure." [37]

Commentary

In order to fulfil her vow, Sayyidah Maryam's mother took her to the Mosque of Baitul-Maqdis and talked to the care-takers and worshippers at the Mosque, Sayyidnā Zakariyyā being one of them, and told them that she had vowed to dedicate the child in the service of God and therefore, she could not keep the child with her. She asked them to take her and keep her.

Sayyidnā 'Imrān was the Imām of this Mosque. He had died during the pregnancy of Maryam's mother, otherwise he would have been the most deserving person to have taken charge of the child, being the father and the Imām of the Mosque. Therefore, every keeper and worshipper of the Mosque wished to take her in his custody. Sayyidnā Zakariyyā pleaded his bid for custody by saying that his wife was Maryam's aunt and she being next to her mother certainly deserved to keep her. But, people did not agree to prefer him over the others. Finally, everybody agreed to draw lots, which turned out to be fairly strange as it would appear later. Here too, it was Sayyidnā Zakariyyā عليه السلام who turned out to be the winner.

So, he got custody of Maryam. According to some reports, he employed a wet-nurse to have her suckled. Other reports say that she just did not need to be suckled. She grew up able to sit and walk and Sayyidnā Zakariyyā عليه السلام put her in a good house adjacent to the Mosque. When he went out, he locked the house and opened it on return. This has been stated briefly in the present verse.

Verse 38

هُنَالِكَ دَعَا زَكَرِيَّا رَبَّهُ قَالَ رَبِّ هَبْ لِي مِنْ لَدُنْكَ ذُرِّيَّةً
طَيِّبَةً إِنَّكَ سَمِيعُ الدُّعَاءِ ﴿٣٨﴾

Thereupon, Zakariyyā prayed to his Lord. He said: "O

my Lord, grant me from Your own (power) a goodly progeny. Verily, You are the listener of the prayer." [38]

Commentary

1. While looking at the first sentence of this verse - هُنَالِكَ دَعَا زَكَرِيَّا رَبَّهُ - (Thereupon, Zakariyyā prayed to his Lord) - we should bear in mind that Sayyidnā Zakariyyā had no offspring upto that time. He had grown old and one usually does not have children in that age, although he firmly believed that Allah, in His ultimate power, could change the usual phenomenon and bless him with an offspring even at his advanced age. But he had not personally witnessed the unusual divine acts - such as he did when he saw unusual and out-of-season eatables provided for Sayyidah Maryam - and that was why he did not have the courage to extend his hand of prayer for an offspring. Now when he saw the miracle with his own eyes, he was persuaded for such prayer under the belief that Allah, who can provide a servant with out-of-season fruits, would also bless him with an offspring, even in this late age, and so he prayed.

2. The second sentence of the verse - قَالَ رَبِّ هَبْ لِي مِنْ لَدُنْكَ ذُرِّيَّةً طَيِّبَةً - 'He said: "O my Lord, grant me from Your own (power) a goodly progeny."' - tells us that making prayers to have children is a blessed practice of the prophets and the righteous.

In another verse Allah Almighty has said: وَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَذُرِّيَّةً "And We sent messengers before you and provided them with wives and children"- (13:38). It means that children are among the blessings of Allah which were bestowed on the Holy Prophet ﷺ as well as on other prophets.

Now, should someone try to stop the birth of children, by any means, he will not only rebel against nature but will also deprive himself of having acted in harmony with the common and agreed practice of prophets عليهم السلام. The Holy Prophet of Islam صلى الله عليه وسلم has given great importance to the question of marriage and children, so much so that he did not allow anyone to avoid married life and children inspite of his capability, and refused to take such a person as a member of his community of followers. He said:

(١) الْبَكَاحُ مِنْ سُنَّتِي

(٢) فَمَنْ رَغِبَ عَنْ سُنَّتِي فَلَيْسَ مِنِّي
(٣) تَزَوَّجُوا الْوُدُودَ الْوَلُودَ فَإِنِّي مُكَافِّرُ بِكُمْ الْأَمَمَ

- (1) Marriage is my *sunnah* (way).
- (2) So, whoever turns away from my *sunnah*, he is not from me.
- (3) Therefore, marry a woman who is loving and fertile, for I shall compete with other communities on the basis of your numbers.

In another verse, Allah Almighty praises those who pray before Him to have a wife in marriage, have children and have them grow good and righteous. He says:

وَالَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ

And those who say: "O our Lord, bless us with such among our wives and our children as be the delight of our eyes. (25:74)

Hasan al-Baṣrī, رحمه الله, says that the Qur'ānic expression - '*qurrata a'yun*' (literally: coolness or lustre of the eyes; meaning someone dearly loved and cherished) - here means that the maker of prayer sees his children and wife devoted in obedience to Allah.

It appears in a *ḥadīth* that Umm Sulaym رضى الله عنها requested the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم to pray for his attendant, Sayyidnā Anas. He made the following prayer for him:

اللَّهُمَّ أَكْثِرْ مَالَهُ وَوَلَدَهُ وَبَارِكْ لَهُ فِيمَا أَعْطَيْتَهُ

O Allah, increase his wealth and his children and make him prosper in what You have bestowed on him.

It was the outcome of this very prayer that Sayyidnā Anas رضى الله عنه had about a hundred children and was also blessed with an ample measure of wealth.

Verse 39

فَنَادَتْهُ الْمَلِكَةُ وَهُوَ قَائِمٌ يُصَلِّي فِي الْمِحْرَابِ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكَ
بِغُلَامٍ مُصَدِّقًا بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَسِدًّا وَحَصُورًا وَنَبِيًّا مِّنَ
الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿٣٩﴾

So then, the angels called out to him, while he stood

praying in the Arch, saying: "Allah gives you the good news of Yahyā (John) who shall come to confirm a word of Allah and shall be a chief, abstinent (from women), a prophet and one of the righteous." [39]

Commentary

1. The expression, كَلِمَةُ اللَّهِ : 'a word of Allah' refers to Sayyidnā 'Isā عليه السلام. This term is used for him because he was created, in an unusual manner, simply by the will and command of Allah - without a paternal linkage.

2. The second quality of Sayyidnā Yahyā has been described by the word, 'ḥaṣūr' translated here as 'abstinent'. It means that he was very particular about keeping himself shielded from temptations, that is, from things one habitually enjoys. When we say one abstains from enjoyments of life, the statement includes abstinence even from fulfilling the desires of things allowed, for example, good food, good dress and marital life and things like these. Since the quality of abstinence has been mentioned here in a positive frame of reference, it obviously seems to suggest that this is the better way, although *aḥadīth* prove the higher merit of living in the bond of marriage. In this situation, the considered opinion is that one whose condition is similar to that of Sayyidnā Yahyā عليه السلام and who is so absorbed in the thought of his life-to-come that he feels no need to have a wife nor has the time and frame of mind to fulfil the rights of his wife and children, then, for such a person this is the better choice. It is because of this particular reason that *aḥadīth* which describe the merit of marriage come up with a restrictive clause as well, that is, *مَنْ اسْتَطَاعَ مِنْكُمُ الْبَاءَةَ* which means that one who can marry and is capable of fulfilling the due rights of his wife, should marry, for this is better for him; otherwise, he is not advised to marry. (Bayān al-Qur'an)

Verses 40 - 41

قَالَ رَبِّ اَنْتَ يَكُوْنُ لِيْ غُلَمٌ وَقَدْ بَلَغَنِي الْكِبَرُ وَامْرَاَتِي عَاقِرٌ قَالَ كَذٰلِكَ اللّٰهُ يَفْعَلُ مَا يَشَآءُ ﴿٤٠﴾ قَالَ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ لِّيْ اَيَّاهُ قَالَ اَيُّكَ اَلَا تُكَلِّمُ النَّاسَ ثَلَاثَةَ اَيَّامٍ اِلَّا رَمَزًا وَاذْكُرْ

رَبِّكَ كَثِيرًا وَسَبِّحْ بِالْعَشِيِّ وَالْإِبْكَارِ ﴿٤١﴾

He said: "O my Lord, how shall I have a boy when old age has come upon me and my wife is barren?" Said He: "That is how Allah does what He wills." [40]

He said: "O my Lord, set for me a sign." Said He: "Your sign is that you shall not be able to speak to people for three days except through gestures. And remember your Lord much and proclaim His purity at evening and at morning." [41]

Commentary

We have already seen that Sayyidnā Zakariyyā عليه السلام believed in the absolute power of Allah and had seen its manifestation repeatedly and that he had himself made the prayer and knew of its acceptance as well, what then, did he mean by asking: 'how shall I have a boy?' The truth of the matter is that the question asked by him was not because of any doubt in the absolute power of Allah. Quite contrary to this, the purpose of the question was to find out the state in which this was to happen: whether the present extreme old age of both of them would remain just as it was, or would that state be changed. The eloquent reply given in كَذَلِكَ اللَّهُ يَفْعَلُ مَا يَشَاءُ (That is how Allah does what He wills) makes it clear that they were to remain at the same age and that they would have an offspring in that very state. This resolves any doubt that may be entertained at this point. (Bayān al-Qur'ān)

2. With reference to verse 41, Sayyidnā Zakariyyā's purpose behind requesting a sign (of pregnancy) was to be happy at the prospect and thus be enabled to show their gratitude all along even prior to the actual birth of the child. So, Allah gave him the sign stated above.

The sign given was remarkably suitable to its purpose. His request for a sign was prompted by his wish to show his gratefulness. Now, the sign set for him leaves him incapable of doing anything but this. Even a hundred signs would have not done what this one sign did and, of course, the noble purpose he had on his mind was all too well-accomplished. (Bayān al-Qur'ān)

3. The last phrase: إِلَّا زَمَرًا (except through gestures) in this verse tells us that in a situation where speech is not possible because of a

valid reason, gesture would be deemed as its substitute. Consequently, it appears in a *ḥadīth* that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم asked a maid-servant: أين الله ('Where is Allah?'). She pointed out towards the sky. He said: 'This maid-servant is a Muslim.' (al-Qurtubī)

Verses 42 - 43

وَإِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَكَةُ يَمْرُؤُا إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاكِ وَطَهَّرَكِ وَاصْطَفَاكِ
عَلَى نِسَاءِ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾ يَمْرُؤُا اقْنُتِي لِرَبِّكِ وَاسْجُدِي
وَارْكَعِي مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

And when the angels said: "O Maryam, Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you over the women of all the worlds. [42] O Maryam, stand in devotion to your Lord, and prostrate and bow down with those who bow." [43]

Commentary

1. In verse 42, the sentence: وَاصْطَفَاكِ عَلَى نِسَاءِ الْعَالَمِينَ (and has chosen you over women of all the worlds) refers to all women in that period of time. Therefore, the statement سَيِّدَةُ نِسَاءِ أَهْلِ الْجَنَّةِ قَاطِمَةُ (Fatimah is the foremost among women of the Paradise) appearing in *ḥadīth* does not contradict it.

2. It will be noticed that, in the last sentence of verse 43: وَارْكَعِي مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ (and bow down with those who bow) while giving an order to bow down, the imperative has been qualified with the words "with those who bow"- but no such qualification appears while giving an order of prostration. This apparently seems to hint that people generally do not observe due concern while making *rukū'* (bowing). They tend to bend a little, then resume the standing position (as if in a hurry). This kind of *rukū'* (bowing) is closer to standing (*qiyām*). As said earlier, it apparently seems to suggest that Allah Almighty, by mentioning the qualification 'those who bow', has given a model to be followed so that one's bowing in prayer could become similar to those who bow fully and perfectly as due.

Verse 44

ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهِ إِلَيْكَ ۚ وَمَا كُنْتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ يَقُولُونَ

أَقْلَامَهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ يَكْفُلُ مَرْيَمَ ۚ وَمَا كُنْتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذِ اتَّخَصُمُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

This is a part of the news of the unseen We reveal to you. And you were not with them when they were casting their pens (to decide) who from among them should be the guardian of Maryam, nor were you with them when they were quarreling. [44]

Commentary

This verse presents an argument to prove the prophethood of Sayyidnā Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم by referring to happenings in the lives of Sayyidnā Zakariyyā and Sayyidah Maryam عليهما السلام. These took place in the remote past and there is no likelihood of their being seen or heard or read, specially so, by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, which by itself proves that his being so informed of the unknown was beyond the ordinary course of learning. He had just no way of finding out such details by any obvious means at his command. Hence, the truth is that this information was revealed to him as part of the message he gave to others. The text very eloquently states that the Holy Prophet ﷺ was not there to see them drawing lots (by throwing their reed pens in water, based on prior agreement that the owner of the pen which flows against the current shall be the winner), nor was he present on the scene when they were initially quarreling about the custody of Maryam before agreeing upon the drawing of lots.

The rule governing *Qur'ah* (فرعة) (to the drawing of lots) according to Ḥanafī jurists, is that *Qur'ah* (drawing of lots) cannot be given a decisive role in determining the rights known and fixed in Islamic Law. Drawing lots in such a situation is included under *Qimār* (gambling). For example, if something is jointly owned by several persons and a lot is drawn to decide that the one whose name comes out in the lot shall take the whole thing; or, in the case of a child whose parentage is disputed, a lot is drawn and the one whose name comes out in the lot drawn is taken to be the father. Drawing lots in such cases is not allowed in Shari'ah. As for rights which depend upon opinion, *Qur'ah* is permissible in them, for instance, while allotting portions of a joint property, A is given the eastern portion and B, the western, by drawing a lot. This is permissible because this was permissible even without having to draw lots by a mutual agreement of the parties con-

cerned or by a decree of a judge. (Bayān al-Qurʿān)

In other words, it can be said that in a situation where the rights of all parties are equal and the purpose of the lot is only to allocate equal portions to each of them and to decide as to which portion is for whom, then drawing a lot is permissible.

Verses 45 - 46

إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَكَةُ يَمْرُؤُا إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِّنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ
عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾
وَيُكَلِّمُ النَّاسَ فِي الْمَهْدِ وَكَهْلًا وَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

When the angels said: "O Maryam, Allah gives you the good news of a word from Him whose name is Masīḥ 'Īsā, the son of Maryam (the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary) a man of status in this world and in the Hereafter and one of the nearest. [45] And he shall speak to the people in the cradle as well as in the middle age, and shall be one of the righteous." [46]

The previous verse (44) appeared parenthetically between the present verses 45 - 46 and verses 42 - 43 and the purpose was to affirm the prophethood of Sayyidnā Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم. The present verse resumes with the story of Sayyidah Maryam which actually prepares the ground for a fuller account of the birth, mission and miracles of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام.

Commentary

One of the qualities of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام mentioned in this verse is that 'he shall speak in the cradle' which means that he will speak while still a child, although no child has the ability to do so. When soon after the birth of infant Jesus, as mentioned in another verse, people chided Sayyidah Maryam on the basis of a false accusation, this new-born infant, Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام spoke up, saying: اِنِّى عَبْدُ اللَّهِ (I am a servant of Allah). Then following immediately, it was said that he will also talk to people when he will be in the later middle of his age (*kahl*). It is worth noting here that the incidence of speaking in infancy was certainly a sign and a miracle and it is quite appropriate to mention it at this point. But, speaking to people during one's middle age is very normal, something everyone does no matter whether he is

a Muslim, or a non-Muslim, learned or illiterate. Why has this been mentioned here as something special? What could it mean?

One answer to this question appears in Bayān al-Qur'ān by Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī who says that the real purpose here is to particularly focus on the miraculous nature of meaningful infant speech. The reference to the speech in the middle age is there to indicate that his childhood speech too would not be the usual baby-talk, rather it would be rational, even learned and eloquent, as man does in his advanced years. If we were to look into the true historical background of Sayyidnā 'Īsā, we would discover that this reference to him as speaking to people in his middle age provides a great standing argument in favour of the Islamic position which, according to the Qur'anic belief, is that Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام has been raised alive onto the heavens.

Hadīth narrations prove that Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام, while so raised, was in the approximate age bracket of 30-35 years which is youth at its best. Middle age, *kahl* in Arabic, was something he never reached during his life in this world. So, his talking to people in his middle age can happen only when he were to grace this world once again with his presence. Therefore, the way his childhood speech was a miracle, his speech in the middle age could be nothing else but another miracle.

Verse 47

قَالَتْ رَبِّ أَنَّى يَكُونُ لِي وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ يَمَسِّنِي بَشَرٌ قَالَ كَذَلِكَ اللَّهُ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ إِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ ﴿٤٧﴾

She said: "O my Lord, how shall I have a son while no human has ever touched me?" Said He: "That is how Allah creates what He wills." When He decides a matter, He simply says to it "Be", and it happens." [47]

The glad tidings given by the angel (verse 46) regarding the birth of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام without a father surprised Sayyidah Maryam as she was a virgin. She wondered how would it happen. Would that be a Divine miracle or would she be asked to marry a man? The Divine answer eliminates the latter possibility. Not restricted by it, 'Allah creates what He wills', that is, His will is all sufficient to bring something into existence. He needs no medium or cause. It is only His com-

mand "be" which makes things come into existence.

Verses 48 - 51

وَيُعَلِّمُهُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَالتَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ ﴿٤٨﴾ وَرَسُولًا
إِلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَآءِيلَ أَنِّي قَدْ جِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ أَنِّي أَخْلُقُ
لَكُمْ مِّنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ فَأَنْفُخُ فِيهِ فَيَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِ
اللَّهِ وَأُبْرِئُ الْأَكْمَةَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ وَأُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ
وَأُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا تَدَّخِرُونَ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ
لَآيَةً لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾ وَمُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ
التَّوْرَةِ وَلِأَحْلَلْ لَكُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي حُرِّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَجِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ
مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُوهُ هَٰذَا صِرَاطٌ مُّسْتَقِيمٌ ﴿٥١﴾

And He shall teach him the Book and the Wisdom, and the Torah and the Injil, [48] and (shall make him) a messenger to the Children of Isra'īl (who will say to them): "I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that is, I create for you from clay something in the shape of a bird, then I blow in it, and it becomes a living bird with the will of Allah; and I cure the born-blind and the leper and I cause the dead to become alive with the will of Allah; and I tell you of what you eat and what you store in your homes. In it there is surely a sign for you, if you are believers." [49]

"And (I have come to you) confirming what is before me, the Torah, and to make permissible for you some of what was prohibited to you. And I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. So, fear Allah and obey me. [50] Allah is surely my Lord and your Lord. So, worship Him. This is the straight path." [51]

1. Verse 48 recounts the august virtues of Sayyidnā 'Īsā who would be born blessed with the honour of learning from Allah: Scriptures, Wisdom and specially the Torah and the Injil; and that he will be sent as a Messenger of Allah to all of the Children of Isra'īl.

2. The message he will carry to them will be his argument in favour of his prophethood. In order that they believe, enumerated in verse 49, there are four signs or miracles that he would perform, being enough for willing believers.

3. Verse 50 says that Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام will declare that he has come to confirm Torah which was revealed before his coming and to make lawful what remained unlawful for them in the law of Moses. This means that the unlawfulness of some things in the earlier code would stand abrogated by the new one, (that of Sayyidnā 'Īsā) whose station of prophethood was the conclusive argument for that claim of abrogation. The proof of his truth were the signs from their Lord.

4. Once his prophethood is established, verse 51 states that Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام will ask them to beware of any contravention of Divine commandments, fear Allah, and follow his teachings in matters of religion which, in a nutshell, are that 'Allah is my Lord and your Lord' (the ultimate in belief) and 'Worship Him' (the ultimate in deeds). This, then, is the straight path which helps perfect the ideal combination of beliefs and deeds, leads to the way of salvation and is the source of communion with Allah.

Ruling:

Making the shape of a bird was the making of a picture, something permitted in that Shari'ah. In our Shari'ah, its permissibility was abrogated.

Verses 52 - 53

فَلَمَّا أَحَسَّ عِيسَى مِنْهُمُ الْكُفْرَ قَالَ مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ
قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَأَشْهَدُ بِأَنَّ
مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾ رَبَّنَا آمَنَّا بِمَا أَنْزَلْتَ وَاتَّبَعْنَا الرَّسُولَ فَاكْتُبْنَا
مَعَ الشَّاهِدِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾

So, when 'Īsā sensed disbelief in them, he said: "Who are my helpers in the way of Allah?" The disciples said: "We are helpers of Allah. We believe in Allah; and be witness that we are Muslims." [52]

"Our Lord, we have believed in what You have re-

vealed, and we have followed the messenger. So, write us down with those who bear witness." [53]

Following blessed predictions mentioned earlier, Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام was born with all promised signs. As a messenger sent to Banī Isrā'īl, he presented his call to them supported by miracles to prove his prophethood. But, the Banī Isrā'īl were adamant and kept on rejecting him as a prophet, even going to the limit of being physically hostile to him.

The text now identifies the very first followers of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام, brings to light their real creed, expressed first before their prophet and then (in verse 53), reiterated it in the form of a prayer before their Lord.

Commentary

The word, *'hawārīyy* (singular of *'al-ḥawārīyyūn*) appearing in verse 52 (translated as 'the disciples'), is a derivation from *ḥawār* which lexically means whiteness. In the religious terminology, the title of *'hawārīyy* has been given to the sincere disciples or companions of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام either because of their sincerity or the purity of their heart, or because of their white dress. Likewise, the Companions of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم have been called, *ṣaḥābīyy* (plural, *ṣaḥābah*).

Some commentators have given the number of the disciples as twelve. Incidentally, the word *'hawārīyy* is also, at times, used in the absolute sense of 'helper' or 'supporter'. It is in this very sense that it was said in a *ḥadīth*: "Every prophet has a *ḥawārīyy*, that is, a sincere companion; Zubair is my *ḥawārīyy*" (Tafsīr al-Qurtubī)

An Important Note:

Verse 52 states that Sayyidnā 'Īsā looked for helpers in the way of Allah only when he sensed hostility from disbelievers, and not at the initial stage of his call. As obvious, he had risen to the task all alone obeying the command of his Lord without worrying about setting up a 'party' in advance. When came the need, he found a group around him. A little thought here would show that every worthy mission demands such determination and courage.

Verses 54 - 55

وَمَكَرُوا وَمَكَرَ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الْمَاكِرِينَ ﴿٥٤﴾ إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ
 يَٰعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ اذْهَبْكَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ يَكْفُرُونَ فَاجْعَلْ أَفْئِدَةً مِّنَ الَّذِينَ
 كَفَرُوا وَجَاعِلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَى يَوْمِ
 الْقِيَمَةِ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ مَرْجِعِكُمْ فَأَحْكُم بَيْنَكُمْ فِيمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ
 تَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

And they made a move, and Allah made a move. And Allah is the best of those who make moves. [54]

When Allah said: "O 'Īsā, I am to take you in full and raise you towards Myself, and cleanse you of those who disbelieve, and place those who follow you above those who disbelieve, upto the Day of Doom. Then to Me is your return, whereupon I shall judge between you in what you have been differing in." [55]

Commentary

In these verses the miraculous event of the Ascension of Sayyidnā 'Īsā (Jesus Christ) has been mentioned. "And they made a move" refers to the evil designs of the Jews who planned to arrest him and to get him crucified.

The next sentence i.e. "and Allah made a move" refers to the plan designed by Allah Almighty to save his prophet 'Īsā from their ill designs. They sent one of them to Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام to arrest him and Allah changed his face totally and made him resemble Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام and raised Sayyidnā 'Īsā to heavens, while that person was crucified under the mistaken identity. How Allah had planned to save 'Īsā عليه السلام from their clutches was disclosed to him when his enemies came to arrest him. The details of these disclosures have been mentioned in verse 55.

Explanation of important words in the verse

Some sects which deny, contrary to the belief of the entire Muslim community, the Ascension of Sayyidnā 'Īsā (Jesus Christ), his being alive in the heavens and his descension towards the later times, have

worked through the words and meanings of these verses to open doors of distortion in the Qur'anic text. Therefore, it seems appropriate that these words be explained in some details.

Let us begin with **وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الْمَكْرِينَ** translated as 'and Allah is the best of those who make moves'. The word, *makr* in Arabic denotes a subtle and secret move or plan. If this is for a good purpose, it is good; and if this is for a bad purpose, it is bad. It was why the restriction of *saiyy* (سَيِّئ : evil) was placed with *makr* (مَكْر : move, plan) in: **وَلَا يَجْعَلُ الْمَكْرُ السَّيِّئُ إِلَّا** (And evil plan besets none but its perpetrator - 35:43).

The Qur'anic word, *makr*, is used exclusively for conspiracy, evil plan and strategy in the everyday idiom of the Urdu language (in which this commentary was originally written), therefore, it should not be equated with the Arabic usage. This is the reason why Allah has been called: **خَيْرُ الْمَكْرِينَ** : '*Khair al-Mākirīn*' here.

The verse means that the Jews started making a series of conspiracies and secret schemes against Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام going to the limit of convincing the ruler of the time that he was a heretic (God forbid) all bent upon changing the Torah and was going to make apostates of everybody. The ruler ordered the arrest of Sayyidnā 'Īsā. While this was the scene on one side, the subtle and secret move made by Allah Almighty was countering their evil plans more effectively, which has been mentioned in the verses coming next.

The word, '*Mutawaffi*' in **إِنِّي مُتَوَفِّيهِ** takes '*tawaffi*' as its verbal noun with its root being '*wafyun*.' Lexically, the word means 'to take in full'. This being its real meaning, its derivations *wafā*, *ifā* and '*istifā*' are used to convey that sense. In fact, the real meaning of *tawaffi* is 'to take in full' which is universally confirmed by all lexicons of the Arabic language. Since man completes his appointed time at the hour of death and the spirit or soul given by Allah is taken back fully and conclusively, it is in that context that this word is also used figuratively in the sense of death. A simple form of death is the daily sleep of human beings. For this too, the Holy Qur'an uses the same word when it says:

اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا وَالَّتِي لَمْ تَمُتْ فِي مَنَامِهَا

'Allah takes away lives of the living at the time of their death and of those that do not die, in their sleep'. (39:42)

Hāfiz Ibn Taimiyyah says in *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (v. 2, p. 83):

التوفى فى لغة العرب معناها القبض والاستيفاء وذلك ثلاثة انواع،
أحدها التوفى فى النوم، والثانى توفى الموت، والثالث توفى الروح والبدن
جميعاً

Al-tawaffī, in the Arabic language, means: to exact fully or take in full. It takes three forms; the first: to take in sleep; the second: to take in death; and the third: to take the soul and the body all together.

In *Kulliyāt Abū al-Baqā'*, it is said:

التوفى الاماتة وقبض الروح، وعليه استعمال العامة او الاستيفاء واخذ
الحق وعليه استعمال البلغاء

Al-tawaffī is putting to death and exacting of the soul in common usage while, in the classical usage, it is taking in full and the exacting of the due right.

Therefore, the majority of scholars have translated the word, متوفىك: '*mutawaffika*' in the verse under study in the sense of 'taking in full'. This means that Allah will not leave Sayyidnā 'Īsā in the hands of the Jews, rather He would take him away which would be in the form that he would be risen unto Him in the heavens.

This is how the words 'I am to take you in full' have been interpreted by the majority of the scholars. However, some authentic commentators of the Holy Qur'ān have interpreted these words in the sense of 'giving death' also, but they do not mean that the death of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام will occur at the hands of his enemies. The true meaning of the verse, according to these commentators is as follows:

Allah Almighty said two things to comfort Jesus at a time when the Jews were bent on killing him. One: That his death will come, not at their hands in the form of killing, but that it would be a natural death. Two: In order to rescue him from the evil designs of those people, Allah Almighty will, at that time, raise Jesus towards Him. This explanation is exactly what has been reported from Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضى الله عنه as quoted by al-Suyūṭī in his *al-Durr al-Manthūr* v. 2, p. 36 on the authority of several narrators.

The gist of this *tafsīr* or explanation is that *tawaffī* does mean giving death, but there is the element of precedence and sequence in the words used. The fact of رَافَعْتُكَ (I shall raise you) will come first and that of مُتَرَبِّعْتُكَ (I shall give you death) later. Now at this point, the wisdom behind mentioning the phenomenon of the earlier lies in the hint that it gives about the events which are to come later on. It means that raising towards Allah will not last for ever; it would be temporary and then, he would return to the mortal world and prevail over enemies and later on, death will come to him in a natural way.

Thus, the event of his return from heaven and his death after having established his victory in the world was not only a miracle but a consummation of the honour and integrity of Jesus, عليه السلام. In addition to that, the unfounded Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus was also refuted. Had it not been so, the event of Jesus being raised towards the heavens alive would have further strengthened their false belief that he too was Living and Eternal like Allah. Therefore, by introducing the word مُتَرَبِّعْتُكَ (pointing out to his death) first, all those misconceptions which might have arisen from 'raising of Jesus' have been refuted in advance.

The reality is that disbelievers and polytheists have always been vehemently opposed to prophets, عليهم السلام. And parallel to that there has been the customary practice of Allah - when a people unto whom a prophet has been sent stick to their own opinion, do not listen to the prophet and do not believe in him even after having witnessed the miracles, then, one of the following two counter-actions were taken: Either those people were annihilated through some natural calamity as was done with 'Ād and Thamūd and the peoples of Prophets Lūṭ and Ṣālih عليهم السلام; or, alternatively Allah would instruct His prophet to migrate from the habitat of disbelievers and go to some other place. It was there that they were provided with such power and glory that they finally achieved victory against the people whom they were sent to. For example Prophet Ibrāhīm, عليه السلام migrated from Iraq and sought refuge in Syria. Similarly, Prophet Mūsā (Moses) عليه السلام, migrated from Egypt and came to Madyan. Finally, the Last prophet, Muḥammad ﷺ migrated from Makkah and came to Madīnah. It was from there that he finally attacked Makkah and conquered it. This raising of Jesus to

the heavens to outmaneuver the threatening designs of the Jews was, in fact, an act of emigration in its own way following which he would return to this world and achieve total victory over the Jews.

Now comes the question as to why this emigration of his, quite separate from the rest, has the heavens as the destination? So, for that matter, Allah Almighty has Himself said about him that his case is like that of Ādam, عليه السلام. The way in which Ādam's birth differs from the normal birth of the rest of creation, (i.e., without a father and a mother) so it is that the birth of Jesus took a miraculous form different from the normal birth of human beings; and his death too, taking a unique and unmatched form, will materialize after hundreds of years following his return to the world -- unprecedented indeed. Why then, should one be surprised if his emigration too follows some such unique pattern?

These marvels of nature led the ignorant among Christians into believing and declaring that he was God, while deliberation into the various aspects of these very marvels, are clear proofs of his servitude as a human being to God, obedience to the Divine will and the demonstration of human traits. It is for this reason that the Holy Qur'ān has made a pointed reference to the refutation of belief in the Godhood of Jesus on all such occasions. The raising towards the heavens would have made this doubt all the more strong. Therefore, by bringing the word *mutawaffika* (I am to take you in full) earlier, this doubt was totally eliminated. Thus we come to realize that this verse, no doubt, aims at negating the Jewish plans since they were all set to crucify and kill Jesus, عليه السلام, and that Allah Almighty made their plans come to nothing. Moreover, this precedence and sequence of words became the mode of refuting the Christians as well, that Jesus was no God who was never to die but that a time will come when he too will meet his death.

In his Tafsīr Imām al-Rāzī has said that such precedence and sequence occurs frequently in the noble Qur'ān in order to cover similar expedient considerations under which an event due later has been mentioned first while an event due earlier has been placed after that. (al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr, v. 2, p. 48)

As for رَافِعُكَ إِلَيَّ (And I shall raise you towards Me), the meaning is clear. Addressing Jesus here, it has been said: 'I shall raise you to-

wards Me'. Every one knows that Jesus is not the name of just the spirit but that of the spirit and the body of Jesus. Now taking the raising of Jesus in the sense that the act of raising was spiritual only, and not physical, is all wrong. As far as the word, *rafʿ* (رَفَعَ : raising) is concerned, there are occasions when it is also used to indicate raising of ranks as it appears in the following verses of the noble Qur'an:

رَفَعَ بَعْضَكُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ

... And raised some of you in ranks over others (6:165).

يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ

... and Allah will raise up in rank those of you who believe and those who have been given knowledge (58:11).

So, it is obvious that the word, *rafʿ* : raising, in the sense of the raising of rank or status has been used figuratively in view of the context of the aforementioned verses. There is no reason here to ignore the real meaning and go by that which is figurative. Moreover, by using the word, *ilā* : إِلَى (towards) alongwith the word, *rafʿ* (رَفَعَ : raising), at this particular place, the possibility of such a figurative meaning has been totally eliminated. What is said in this verse is رَافِعُكَ إِلَيَّ : *rāfi'uka ilaiyya*: I shall raise you towards Me. Then there is the verse from Sūrah al-Nisā' (4:158), which refutes the belief of Jews; there too, what was said is: وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا بَلْ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ that is, the Jews certainly did not kill Jesus, instead, Allah raised him towards Himself. This later expression is used for nothing but the raising alive of the spirit and the body.

Explained this far were the words of the verse.

Allah Almighty's Five Promises to Jesus

In the verse under reference, Allah Almighty made five promises to 'Īsā عليه السلام vis-a-vis the Jews:

1. The first promise was that his death will not come at the hands of the Jews through killing. It will be a natural death coming at its appointed time and that appointed time will come close to the Day of Doom, when 'Īsā عليه السلام will come down from the heavens onto the earth as reported in details in sound aḥādīth transmitted through unbroken chains, part of which will appear later.

2. The second promise was to raise him towards the heavens in the

existing situation. This was fulfilled right then. The report of this fulfillment was given in Sūrah al-Nisā' (4:158) by saying:

وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا بَلْ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ

Certainly, the Jews did not kill him, instead; Allah Almighty raised him towards Himself.

3. The third promise was: وَمُطَهِّرًا مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا, that is, to have him cleansed of false accusations brought on him by his enemies. That promise was fulfilled when the last of the prophets صلى الله عليه وسلم came and refuted all false accusations of the Jews. For instance, the Jews threw slanders on the parentage of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام because of his having been born without a father. The noble Qur'an refuted this slander by declaring that he was born without a father because such was the power and will of Allah. And that too does not call for much of a surprise. More surprising is the birth of Ādam since he was born without both a father and a mother.

The Jews accused Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام of claiming to be God. There are many verses in the noble Qur'an in which, contrary to this accusation, Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام has been reported to have publicly confessed his being human and a servant and bondsman of Allah.

4. The fourth promise appears in وَجَاعِلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا (and placed those who follow you above those who disbelieve) which means that his followers will be made to overcome those who deny and oppose him. This promise was fulfilled in the sense that following here means the belief in and confession of the prophethood of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام. The belief in and the practice of all injunctions ascribed to him is not a pre-condition. Thus the Christians and the Muslims both fall in this category as they believe in the prophethood and messengership of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام. However, this is a different matter that holding this much of belief is not enough to bring forth salvation in the Hereafter. Instead, the salvation in the Hereafter depends on believing in all injunctions brought by Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام. One of the instructions given by Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام was that his followers should believe and have faith in the last of the Prophets (صلى الله عليه وسلم), who would come after Jesus departs. The Christians did not follow this instruction in matters of faith and belief, therefore, they deprived them-

selves of salvation in the Hereafter while Muslims acted in accordance with that too, therefore, they became deserving of salvation in the Hereafter. But, part of the promise which relates to having dominant authority over Jews was dependent on the prophethood of Sayyidnā 'Isā عليه السلام only. That dominance in the world has always been the fate of Christians and Muslims vis-a-vis the Jews, and surely, so shall it be through the Day of Judgement.

From the time when Allah Almighty made this promise right upto now, it has always been the case that the Christians and Muslims have dominated the Jews. The world has seen the establishment of their empires. The existence of the present state of Israel cannot make the truth of this position doubtful for several reasons. To begin with, and in reality, this state is no more than a manifestation of the military might of Russia and the Christians of Euro-American origin which they have established and maintained against Muslims. As soon as Russia, America and countries of Europe withdraw their patronage, the world will itself witness the instant collapse of this state and its disappearance from the map of the world. Therefore, people who can see the reality do realise the actual position of Israel or the Government of the Jews. It is by no means a manifestation of the domination of Jews. If, just for the sake of argument, it is taken to be their own state, even then, who would - in his right frame of mind - deny that, given the totality of Christians and Muslims, they are wielders of lesser influence and are much subjugated with fear. Even if we were to leave this aspect aside, we know that a temporary domination by the Jews close to the Day of Judgement has been reported in the authentic reports of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Now if this world is destined to exist for any considerable period of time and if the Day of Judgement is close, that domination too is not contrary to the reports which Muslims consider authentic. Moreover, such short-lived occupation cannot be given the name of a state or government especially when it is based on a conspiracy hatched by the Christians and the communists.

5. The fifth promise, that of giving a decision in respect of such conflicts in faith on the Day of Judgement will certainly be fulfilled on its appointed time as it has been indicated in the verse:

ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ مَرْجِعِكُمْ فَأَحْكُم بَيْنَكُمْ

Then, to Me is your return, whereupon I shall judge between you. (3:55)

JESUS: The question of his life and second coming:

The Jews are the only people in the world who say that Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام was crucified, killed and buried following which he never returned to life. What happened really and truly has been clarified in verse 158 of Sūrah al-Nisā' in the Holy Qur'an. Then, in **وَمَكَرُوا وَمَكَرَ اللَّهُ** (And they made a move, and Allah made a move.) of the present verse, it has been pointed out that Allah Almighty made the sinister move of the enemies of 'Īsā recoil upon those who had gone into the house to kill Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام. It was one of them that Allah Almighty changed to look exactly like Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام and then He raised Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام alive onto the heavens. The words of the verse are as follows:

وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَٰكِنْ شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ

And they did not kill him and they did not crucify him, but they were deluded by resemblance (4:157).

Details regarding this will appear under the commentary on Sūrah al-Nisā'.

The Christians said that Jesus was, no doubt, killed on the cross but was brought back to life once again and raised onto the heavens. The verse under reference has refuted this false notion as well. It is stressed here that similar to the Jews who were rejoicing after killing their own man, the Christians fell a victim to the same mistaken identity by believing that it was Jesus who got killed on the Cross, and as such, the Christians too became the victims of mistaken identity. This is obvious from the Qur'anic statement **شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ** (they were deluded by resemblance) just like the Jews were deceived by mistaken identity.

As opposed to the view of these two groups, there is the Islamic belief, stated here in this verse and in several other verses clearly, which says that Allah Almighty raised him alive onto the heavens in order to rescue him from the Jews. He was not to be killed and he was not to be crucified. He is in the heavens alive and it will be close to the Day of Judgement when he shall come down from the heavens, lead the Mus-

hims to victory over the Jews, and finally, he will die a natural death.

There is a consensus of the entire Muslim community on this belief. Ḥāfiẓ ibn Hajr, in his *Talkhīṣ al-Ḥabīr*, has reported this consensus (page 319). This belief, and the consensus of the community on it, stands proved on the authority of several verses of the Holy Qur'ān and reports from *mutawāṭir* aḥādīth transmitted through an unbroken chain of reporting. However, this is not the place for its detailed discussion, and not necessary either. The reason being that scholars of the community have already taken up this question in special books with full clarity giving detailed answers to those who dispute in the Ascension of the Christ. For instance, the Arabic work, '*Aqīdatu l'Islām fī Ḥayāti 'Īsā عليه السلام*' by Ḥujjatu l'Islām Maulānā Sayyid Muḥammad Anwar Shāh al-Kashmīrī, *Ḥayāt-e-'Īsā عليه السلام*, (the Life of Jesus) in Urdu by Haqrat Maulānā Badr 'Alam Muḥājir Madani, *Ḥayāt-e-Masīḥ عليه السلام* in Urdu by Maulānā Sayyid Muḥammad Idrīs and hundreds of other books or essays dealing with this question have been widely published and circulated. While carrying out the orders of his respected teacher, Maulānā Sayyid Muḥammad Anwar Shāh al-Kashmīrī, this writer had collected more than one hundred *mutawāṭir* aḥādīth identified by him which prove in an undeniable manner that Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام was raised alive and that he will return close to the Day of Judgement. This collection in book form and entitled, *Al-Tasrīḥ bimā Tawātara fī Nuzūl al-Masīḥ* has been recently published from Beirut with marginal notes and commentary by 'Allāma 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah, a revered scholar of Aleppo, Syria.

Ḥāfiẓ ibn Kathīr while explaining the verse *وانه لعلم للساعة* of Sūrah Al-Zukhruf (43:61) has said:

وقد تواترت الاحاديث عن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم انه اخبر بنزول عيسى عليه السلام قبل يوم القيامة اماما عادلاً الخ

There are aḥādīth from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, narrated in an uninterrupted succession, that he proclaimed the coming of 'Īsā عليه السلام before the Day of Judgment as a just leader.

At this stage I would like to draw the attention of the reader to a point which, if noticed even with a small measure of sanity and justice,

would leave no room for any doubt regarding this question. The point is that in the eleventh section of Sūrah 'Āl-'Imrān, Allah Almighty while refering to past prophets deemed it sufficient to refer to prophets Ādam, Nūḥ, 'Āl-Ibrāhīm and 'Āl-'Imrān briefly in one single verse. After that, it was in nearly three sections and twenty two verses that reference was made to Sayyidnā 'Isā عليه السلام and his family with meticulous detail - something which has not been made in that manner even in respect of the Last of the prophets صلى الله عليه وسلم to whom the Qur'ān was revealed. Note the detailed mention of the grandmother of Jesus, her pledge, the birth of his mother, her name, her upbringing, the conceiving of Jesus by his mother then the detailed narrative of his birth, followed by the description of what his mother ate and drank, after child birth, her return to the family with the newborn child, their blames and curses, first the gift of eloquence to the newborn as his miracle, then his growing up and call to his people, opposition faced and the help of disciples, the hostile attempts by the Jews to trap and kill him, his being raised alive onto the heavens - then complete details of his additional traits, his looks, physique, dress and its likes - these are accounts which have not been taken up in the whole spectrum of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth in respect of any prophet or messenger with that much of detail. This point is an open invitation to everyone to think as to why did this happen and what was the wisdom behind it.

Even a moment's reflection here makes it clear that the Last of the prophets صلى الله عليه وسلم, being the final prophet and messenger with no apostle to come after him, took special care to guide his community about conditions that it was going to face right through the Day of Judgement. He therefore, took upon himself to identify those who would be worthy of the community's following. He, as a matter of principle, described them with a profile of their general qualities. There were other blessed people whom he identified by name and emphatically asked the community to follow them. Other than these, he also marked out the astray and the deviating who posed a danger to the faith of the community.

Of the mischief-makers who were to come after the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم the most notorious was Dajjāl (the anti-Christ) the imposter of the Messiah, whose disturbing wickedness was terribly deviation-prone. Therefore, the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم related many de-

tails of his profile, attending conditions and distinguishing traits, so that there remains no room for the community to doubt about his being a mischief monger whenever he appears. Similarly, among the later day religious reformers and power-worthy elders, Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام is the most distinguished whom Allah Almighty blessed with the station of prophethood, kept him alive in the heavens to come to the rescue of the Muslim community during the wicked period of Dajjāl (anti-Christ) and appointed him to kill Dajjāl close to the Day of Judgement. This is why it was deemed necessary that the community should be given the most clear indications of his person and qualities as well, so that no human being remains in doubt while identifying Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام when he comes, the second time.

There are many elements of wisdom in this treatment.

Firstly, should the community find it difficult to identify 'Īsā (Jesus Christ) عليه السلام, the very purpose of his coming will be negated. If the Muslim community will not identify and cooperate with him, how could he help and support them? Secondary, although Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام will not come into the world at that time designated as Prophet, but he would come to lead the Muslim community as the *Khalifa* (viceregent) the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, the personal station of prophethood that he has will not be taken from him. Instead, he would be like the governor of a province or state who continues to hold that position even if he has gone out to visit some other province or state for some reason. Therefore, even though he is not as a governor in that province, the office of the governorship has not been *ipso facto* taken away from him. Similarly, Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام will not be without his attribute of prophethood at that time, and the way the rejection of his prophethood was infidelity earlier, so infidelity it shall be at that time. Now the Muslim community which has already nursed and shown its faith in his prophethood as based on the guidance of the Qur'ān would fall into the grievous error of rejection, if it fails to recognize him when he comes. So, clarifying his signs and attributes in a greater measure was extremely necessary.

Thirdly, since the event of the coming of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام will take place towards the later years of this mortal world, chances were - given the ambiguity in his marks of identification that some other per-

son could come up with the claim of being Messiah, the son of Mary, in which case, these indicators will serve well to refute and reject any such claim. This is what happened in pre-partition India where Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian claimed that he was the promised Messiah. The scholars of the Muslim community refuted his claim on the basis of these very cited indicators.

In short, here and at other places, the very fact of such detailed description concerning Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام is in itself indicating that his reappearance is due close to the Day of Judgement and that he would return to the world. This humble writer has taken up this subject in full details in his Urdu treatise entitled Masīh Maw'ūd kī pah-ḥān (Identifying the Promised Messiah) which may be consulted for these details.

Verses 56 - 58

فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَأَعَذِّبُهُمْ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ
وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ تَصْرِيحٍ ﴿٥٦﴾ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا
الصَّالِحَاتِ فَيُوَفِّيهِمْ أُجُورَهُمْ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٥٧﴾
ذَلِكَ نَتْلُوهُ عَلَيْكَ مِنَ الْآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ ﴿٥٨﴾

Now, as for those who disbelieve, I shall punish them, a severe punishment, in this world and in the Hereafter; and for them there are no helpers. [56]

And as for those who believe and do good deeds, He (Allah) will give them their rewards in full. And Allah does not like transgressors. [57]

This We recite to you of the Verses and the Message that is full of wisdom. [58]

Sequence

In the previous verse (56), it was said that Allah will be the final judge and decision-maker in what they used to differ in between themselves. This verse describes that decision.

Commentary

Are the sufferings of this world beneficial for the next life?

The words "I shall punish them in this world and in the Hereafter"

in verse 56 may create a little doubt. Since the statement here relates to the judgement to be pronounced on the Last Day, how can the statement -'I shall punish them in this world and in the hereafter'- be explained as this world of ours would not exist at that time and even though it exists today, but the judgement is to be given on the Day of Resurrection?

This difficulty can be resolved by turning to an analogy. This saying is similar to the saying of a judge to a culprit -'Right now I am sending you to the jail for a year; if you misbehave there, I shall make it for two years'- which simply means that those two years will be counted from the day the punishment is being awarded. Based on this, it is certain that following any misbehaviour the two-year punishment will become effective. So, given the misconduct, the validity of this whole will regulate itself for one more year as 'add-on'.

The same applies here as the punishment in the world has already been given; now the punishment of the Hereafter will be added on and the sum-total will be finally executed on the Last Day, that is, having been punished in the world will not serve as expiation for the punishment of the Hereafter. This is contrary to the condition of believers who, when struck by suffering in the mortal world, have their sins forgiven and find the punishment due in the Hereafter lightened or ward off. For this reason, a hint to this effect has been made in لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ (and Allah does not like transgressors -v. 57), that is, believers are dear because of their belief and the beloved ones are always treated in such a manner. The disbelievers are detested because of their disbelief and those detested do not receive such treatment. (Bayān al-Qurʿān)

Verses 59 - 63

إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَىٰ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ آدَمَ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ ﴿٥٩﴾ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُن مِّنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾ فَمَنْ حَاجَّكَ فِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ فَقُلْ تَعَالَوْا نَدْعُ أَبْنَاءَنَا وَأَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَنِسَاءَنَا وَنِسَاءَكُمْ وَأَنْفُسَنَا وَأَنْفُسَكُمْ ثُمَّ تَبَتُّهُمْ أَفَنُجَعَلُ لَعْنَتِ اللَّهِ عَلَىٰ

الْكٰذِبِيْنَ ﴿٦١﴾ اِنَّ هٰذَا لَهٗوَ الْقَصَصِ الْحَقِّ وَمَا مِنْ اِلٰهٍ اِلَّا اللّٰهُ وَاِنَّ اللّٰهَ لَهٗوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيْمُ ﴿٦٢﴾ فَاِنْ تَوَلَّوْاْ فَاِنَّ اللّٰهَ عَلِيْمٌ بِالْمُفْسِدِيْنَ ﴿٦٣﴾

Surely, the case of 'Īsā, in the sight of Allah, is like the case of 'Ādam. He created him from dust, then said to him, "Be", and he came to be. [59] The truth is from your Lord. So, do not be of those who doubt. [60]

So, if someone argues with you in this after what has come to you of the knowledge, say, "Come, let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, then pray and invoke the curse of Allah upon the liars." [61]

This is, indeed, the true narration. And there exists no god but Allah. And Allah is surely the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. [62]

So, should they turn back, Allah is all-aware of the mischievous. [63]

The event of *Mubāhala* and the refutation of heretics.

The background of these verses is that the Holy Prophet ﷺ sent an ultimatum to the Christians of Najrān which included three options in the order given below:

1. Accept Islām, or
2. Pay *jizya* (a levy on free non-Muslims under Muslim rule), or
3. Get ready for a war.

After mutual consultation, the Christians sent a delegation to the Holy Prophet ﷺ consisting of Shurahbīl 'Abdullāh b. Shurahbīl and Jabbār ibn Fayḍ to the Holy Prophet ﷺ. They came and began their talks on religious issues. When they, in their effort to prove the godhood of Jesus, took their debate to the extremes of dispute, that was the moment this verse of *Mubāhala* was revealed. Thereupon, the Holy Prophet ﷺ invited the Christians to join in the *Mubāhala* confrontation (a form of resolving disputes by praying to Allah, the details of which shall shortly be discussed) and quite readily, he himself came out with Sayyidah Fāṭimah رضى الله عنها ,

Sayyidnā 'Alī رضي الله عنه and their sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusain رضي الله عنهما along with him all set for the *Mubāhalah*. Looking at this, Shuraḥbīl said to his two comrades: 'Look, you already know that he is a prophet of Allah and getting into a *Mubāhalah* confrontation with a prophet means certain death and destruction for us. So find out some other way to get out of this fix.' His comrades asked him as to what he thought it could be. Shuraḥbīl said: 'I think the best solution is to opt for a truce as advised by the prophet'. So, on this everybody agreed. As a result, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم made peace by fixing a levy on them which was accepted by them as well. (Tafsīr ibn Kathīr, v. 1).

The Meaning of *Mubāhalah*

As stated earlier, verse 61 has instructed the Holy Prophet ﷺ to invite his opponents (Christians) to *Mubāhalah* which literally means 'mutual prayer' but in the terminology of Islāmic Sharī'ah it refers to a particular form of resolving religious disputes. When the argumentations from both sides fail to resolve a religious issue, the parties jointly pray Allah to cast His curse on whichever of the two parties is false. Since curse means 'moving someone far away from the divine mercy', - and moving far away from mercy is being close to divine wrath--therefore, the essence of the meaning is: Wrath be on the liar. As such, whoever is the liar shall face the evil consequences whereupon the truth will become evident before the disbelievers as well. Invocation in this manner is called '*Mubāhalah*'.

Originally, the *Mubāhalah* can be carried out by the disputants only; they can simply get together and pray. It is not necessary that all their family members are assembled. However, if all the family members participate in the *Mubāhalah*, it becomes more effective. (That is why the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was instructed to invite the family members of both sides).

'Son' includes grandson

In verse 61 the words 'our sons' does not mean 'our' sons as of the loins only. Instead, the sense is general. They may be sons or grandsons, because this is how the word is used in common usage. Therefore, the grandsons of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, namely Sayyidnā Ḥasan and Sayyidnā Ḥusain رضي الله عنهما, as well as Sayyidnā 'Alī رضي الله عنه the son-in-law of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم

are all included in the words: 'our sons'.

Sayyidnā 'Alī رضي الله عنه has another additional reason for being included in the 'sons' of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, because he had grown up under the patronage of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم who had treated him like his own son.

It is, therefore, evident that Sayyidnā 'Alī رضي الله عنه is included in the words: 'our sons'. Some *Shī'ites* have claimed that since he was not the son of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم he could not be referred to by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم as 'our son'. Through this notion the *Shī'ites* conclude that Sayyidnā 'Alī رضي الله عنه was included in the words 'ourselves', therefore, he was the immediate successor of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم.

The fallacy of this argument is evident from what has been discussed above.

Verse 64

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ
لَا نَعْبُدُ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكُ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا
أَرْبَابًا مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا
مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

Say, "O people of the Book, come to a word common between us and you that we worship none but Allah, that we associate nothing with Him and that some of us do not take some others as lords instead of Allah." Then, should they turn back, say, "You be witness that we are Muslims." [64]

Commentary:

Important Principles of *Tablīgh* and *Da'wah*:

This verse: *قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ* unfolds an important principle of *Tablīgh* (Preaching) and *Da'wah* (Preaching Islām). The principle requires that a person, who desires to carry his call to a group which holds beliefs and ideas different from his own, should follow a particular method. That method is to induce that group to unite only on what they both can agree to, for instance, when the Holy Prophet ﷺ gave

the Byzantine ruler, Hiraql (Heraclius) the call to Islām, he picked up a particular point on which there was mutual agreement, i.e., on the Oneness of Allah Almighty. That invitation is reproduced below:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ، مِنْ مُحَمَّدٍ عَبْدَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ إِلَى هِرَقْلَ عَظِيمِ
الرُّومِ، سَلامٌ عَلَى مَنْ اتَّبَعَ الْهُدَى، أَمَّا بَعْدُ فَأَنَا أَدْعُوكَ بِدَعَايَةِ الْإِسْلَامِ
أَسْلَمَ تَسْلَمَ يُؤْتِكَ اللَّهُ أَجْرَكَ مَرَّتَيْنِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّيْتَ فَإِنْ عَلَيْكَ آثَمُ الْيَرَسِينَ،
يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ
وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ (البخارى)

I begin with the name of Allah who is All-Merciful, Very-Merciful. From Muḥammad, servant of Allah, and His messenger: To Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor. Peace be on him who takes the right path. After that, I invite you to the call of Islām. Embrace Islām and be in peace. Allah will bestow upon you a twofold reward, but should you turn away, then, on you shall be the sin of your subjects. "O people of the Book, come to a word common between us and you that we worship none but Allah, that we associate nothing with Him and that some of us do not take some others as Lord instead of Allah." (Al-Bukhārī)

The statement, 'you be witness...' in the last sentence of the verse teaches us a lesson, that is, should someone refuse to accept the truth, even after it has been proved clearly, then the proper course is to re-state one's own belief and conclude the conversation. Entering into further debate and verbal altercation is not appropriate.

Verses 65 - 68

يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تُحَاجُّونَ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمَا أُنْزِلَتِ التَّوْرَةُ
وَالْإِنْجِيلُ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾ هَآأَنْتُمْ هَؤُلَاءِ
حَاجَجْتُمْ فِيمَا لَكُمْ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلِمَ تُحَاجُّونَ فِيمَا لَيْسَ لَكُمْ بِهِ
عِلْمٌ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾ مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ
يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَكِنْ كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُسْلِمًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ
الْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾ إِنَّ أَوَّلَى النَّاسِ بِإِبْرَاهِيمَ لِلَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُ وَهَذَا

النَّبِيِّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَاللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾

O people of the Book, why do you argue about Ibrāhīm while the Torah and the Injīl were not revealed until after him? Have you, then, no sense? [65]

Look, this is what you are - you argued about what you had knowledge; why then do you argue about what you have no knowledge? And Allah knows and you do not know. [66]

Ibrāhīm was not a Jew, nor a Christian. But he was upright, a Muslim, and was not one of those who associate partners with Allah. [67]

The closest of people to Ibrāhīm are those who followed him, and this prophet, and those who believe. And Allah is guardian of the believers. [68]

Commentary

The argumentation referred to in verse 65 was to decide whether Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام followed the way of the Jews, or that of the Christians. The futility of their exercise already stood exposed as both these ways in religion appeared long after the revelation of the Old and New Testaments. These just did not exist before that. How, then, could it be claimed that Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام adhered to these ways?

Verse 66 points out to the hollowness of their approach when they indulged in their argumentation on the basis of incomplete knowledge. That they would venture to do so on the basis of no knowledge could hardly be explained. The truth is that only Allah knows the way of Ibrāhīm عليه السلام .

That way has been described in Verse 67.

Verse 68 declares that the closest of people to Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm were those who followed him during his time and now the closest to him is the Prophet of Islām, Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā صلى الله عليه وسلم and so are the believers in him and in past prophets. These believers are the community of Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم and their guardian is Allah and He will reward them for their belief.

Verses 69 - 71

وَدَّتْ طَائِفَةٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَوْ يُضِلُّوكُمْ وَمَا يُضِلُّونَ إِلَّا
 أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ
 اللَّهِ وَأَنْتُمْ تَشْهَدُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تَلْبِسُونَ الْحَقَّ
 بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتَكْتُمُونَ الْحَقَّ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧١﴾

A group from the people of the Book loves to mislead you, while they mislead none but themselves and they do not realise. [69]

O people of the Book, why do you disbelieve in the signs of Allah while you are yourselves a witness? [70]

O People of the Book, why do you confound the truth with falsehood, and conceal the truth when you know?

[71]

Commentary

Verse 69 exposes the cherished desire of the people of the Book to mislead Muslims away from the true faith they are on. The text, then, firmly declares that the victim of their effort to misguide is no one other than themselves, something they do not realize.

Verse 70, addressing the people of the Book, asks them as to why they disbelieve in the signs of Allah, such as the verses in Torah and Injil which prove the prophethood of Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم because the denial of his prophethood amounts to declaring these verses to be false which is infidelity, although they themselves confirm these as true. This is an admonition on their error in belief.

Proceeding further, Verse 71 admonishes them for confusing the real statement, that is, the prophecy about the prophethood of Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم with the fictitious, that is, the interpolated statements or false exegesis. The crucial question being asked is as to why would they conceal the truth of the matter despite knowing the truth, and knowing that they are hiding it.

The words in أَنْتُمْ تَشْهَدُونَ (you are yourselves a witness - 70) and in تَعْلَمُونَ (you know - 71) should not be taken to mean that disbelief will become permissible for them if they do not attest to the truth or have no

knowledge about it. This is because *kufr* (disbelief) is intrinsically an abominable thing to practice. This is prohibited under all conditions. However, the mention of *kufr* (disbelief) after knowledge and attestation is to increase the impact of reproachment.

Verses 72 - 74

وَقَالَتْ طَائِفَةٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ آمَنُوا بِالَّذِي أُنْزِلَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ
آمَنُوا وَجَهُ التَّهَارِ وَكَفَرُوا بآخِرِهِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾
وَلَا تُؤْمِنُوا إِلَّا لِمَن تَبِعَ دِينَكُمْ قُلْ إِنَّ الْهُدَى هُدَى اللَّهِ أَن
يُؤْتَى أَحَدٌ مِّثْلَ مَا أُوتِيتُمْ أَوْ يُحَاجُّوكُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّكُمْ قُلْ إِنَّ
الْفَضْلَ بِيَدِ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَن يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٣﴾
يَخْتَصُّ بِرَحْمَتِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٧٤﴾

And a group from the people of the Book said, "Believe in what has been revealed to the believers in the early part of the day, and disbelieve at the end of it, so that they may turn back. [72] And do not believe except in those who follow your faith." Say, "(Real) guidance is the guidance of Allah." (But all that you do is due to your envy) that someone is given what is similar to that which you have been given, or that they argue against you before your Lord. Say, "The bounty is in the hands of Allah. He gives it to whom He wills. And Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing. [73] He chooses for His grace whom He wills. And Allah is the Lord of great bounty." [74]

Some from among the people of the Book chose a strategy of deception in order to mislead Muslims. According to their agreed plan, they would declare their belief in the Qur'an in the morning and then reject it in the evening. They thought that this quick about-turn would create doubts in the minds of Muslims about Qur'an and Islām and they might turn away from their faith thinking that there must be something wrong with Islām visible to such learned people who were open-minded enough to accept it first. They also made it a point to reserve their feinted declaration of belief in Islām to hoodwink Muslims only! Their true belief, they planned, would be affirmed before none

but only those who follow their own creed. The rule was: Sincerity with the later, expediency with the former!

That these tricks are low is proved later in Verse 73 when the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been asked to declare that their clever moves are not going to work for them since Guidance given to servants of Allah is certainly from Allah. So, it is He who, with Guidance in His control, can make whoever He will steadfast on that Guidance. No one can succeed in weaning such a person away from it with any trick, plan or enticement whatsoever.

The reason why they act in the way they do is envy, that is, they envy Muslims as to why they were given the Scripture, or they envy their supremacy in religious argument. It is because of this envy that they keep working to bring about the downfall of Islām and of the community that adheres to it.

That this envy is based on not knowing the nature, timing and wisdom of Allah's grace and mercy is explained in the later part of verse 73 and in verse 74.

Verse 75

وَمِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ مَنْ إِنْ تَأْمَنَهُ بِقِنطَارٍ يُؤَدِّهِ إِلَيْكَ وَمِنْهُمْ
مَنْ إِنْ تَأْمَنَهُ بدينارٍ لَا يُؤَدِّهِ إِلَيْكَ إِلَّا مَا دُمْتَ عَلَيْهِ قَائِمًا
ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا لَيْسَ عَلَيْنَا فِي الْأُمِّيَن سَبِيلٌ وَيَقُولُونَ
عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

And among the people of the Book there is one who, if you entrust him with a heap (of gold or silver), will give it back to you; and among them there is one who, if you entrust him with a single *dinār*, he will not give it back to you unless you keep standing over him. This is because they have said, "There is no way we can be blamed in the matter of the unlettered." And they tell lies about Allah knowingly. [75]

Sequence

In the previous verses (70-72), breach of faith committed by the people of the Book was mentioned. This included disbelieving in the

verses of Allah, confusing the truth with what is false, concealing the truth and conspiring to mislead Muslim believers.

In the verse cited above (75), their breach of trust in matters of property has been mentioned. Since some of them happened to be trustworthy, both types were identified.

Commentary

Praising good qualities in some non-Muslim is correct

In this verse (75), some people have been praised for their trustworthiness. If this 'some' refers to those among the people of the Book who had embraced Islām, praising them poses no problems. But, in case, it does not refer to Muslims particularly and instead, refers to the people of the Book in the absolute sense including non-Muslims as well, then the situation generates the question: When no act of a *kāfir* (disbeliever) is acceptable why praise them?

The answer is that for an action or deed to become acceptable is a different matter and having a word of praise for it is something else. From praising something it does not follow that it is acceptable with Allah. The purpose is to point out that something good, even if it be that of a *kāfir* (disbeliever), is good enough in a certain degree, the benefit of which he receives in the form of good reputation in the mortal world, and of course, in the Hereafter, in the form of a reduction in punishment for his disbelief.

This statement also makes it clear that Islām does not resort to prejudice and short-sightedness. On the contrary, it shows open-hearted appreciation of the excellence of even its adversary in respect of his achievements.

It is from this verse: *إِلَّا مَا دُمْتُ عَلَيْهِ قَائِمًا* (unless you keep standing over him - 75) that Imām Abū Ḥanīfah has deduced the ruling that the lender has the right to keep pursuing the borrower until he receives his due. (Qurtubī, v. 4)

Verses 76 - 77

بَلَىٰ مَنْ أَوْفَىٰ بِعَهْدِهِ وَاتَّقَىٰ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٧٦﴾ إِنَّ
الَّذِينَ يَشْتَرُونَ بِعَهْدِ اللَّهِ وَأَيْمَانِهِمْ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا أُولَٰئِكَ لَا خَلَاقَ

لَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ وَلَا يُكَلِّمُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَلَا يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهِمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ
وَلَا يُزَكِّيهِمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٧﴾

Why not? Whoever fulfils his pledge and fears Allah, then, Allah loves the God-fearing. [76] Surely, those who take a small price out of the covenant of Allah and out of their oaths, for them there is no share in the Hereafter, and Allah will not speak to them, nor will He look towards them on the Day of Doom, nor will He purify them. And for them there is a painful punishment. [77]

Sequence

Earlier, in بَيِّنَات (they say - 75), there was a refutation of the claim made by the people of the Book. Onwards from there, in verses 76-77, the same refutation has been re-asserted and the merit of fulfilling a commitment as well as the condemnation for its breach have been clarified.

Commentary

'Ahd (pledge or covenant) is what gets settled between parties concerned after mutual discussions and by which both of them have to abide. Contrary to this is وعده : *wa'dah* or promise which issues forth from a single side, that is, 'ahd (pledge or covenant) is bilateral while *wa'dah* (promise) is unilateral.

That commitments should be fulfilled has been stressed in the Qur'an and Sunnah time and again. For instance, right here in verse 77 cited above, five warnings have been given to those who break their solemn pledge:

1. They will have no share in the blessings of the heaven. In a ḥadīth, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said that one who usurps the right of a Muslim under false oath makes the fire of Hell compulsory for himself. The narrator of the ḥadīth asked if the Fire will become compulsory even if this concerned something very insignificant? In reply, he said: Even if this be the green bough of a tree. (Muslim vide Mazharī)

2. Allah Almighty will not speak to them with glad tidings.

3. Allah Almighty will not look at them mercifully on the Day of Doom.

4. Allah Almighty will not forgive them their sins since they wasted away the rights of a servant of Allah through breach of trust, and Allah will not forgive what a human being owes to another human being. In Islāmic terminology, this is known as the *ḥaqq al-'abd* or the right of a servant of Allah.

5. And a grievous punishment shall await them.

Verses 78 - 80

وَإِنَّ مِنْهُمْ لَفَرِيقًا يَلُونُ أَلْسِنَتَهُم بِالْكِتَابِ لِتَحْسَبُوهُ مِنَ
الْكِتَابِ وَمَا هُوَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَيَقُولُونَ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ وَمَا
هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ ۖ وَيَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ
﴿٧٨﴾ مَا كَانَ لِبَشَرٍ أَنْ يُؤْتِيَهُ اللَّهُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحُكْمَ وَالنُّبُوَّةَ ثُمَّ
يَقُولَ لِلنَّاسِ كُونُوا عِبَادًا لِي مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنْ
كُونُوا رَاسِخِينَ ۖ إِنَّمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ الْكِتَابَ وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَدْرُسُونَ
﴿٧٩﴾ وَلَا يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تَتَّخِذُوا الْمَلَائِكَةَ وَالنِّسَاءَ أَرْبَابًا ۖ
إِنَّمَا يُمْرُكُمْ بِالْكَفْرِ بَعْدَ إِذْ أَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

And among them there is indeed a group who twist their tongues in (reading) the Book, so that you may deem it to be from the Book, while it is not from the Book. And they say, "It is from Allah", while it is not from Allah. And they tell lies about Allah knowingly.

[78]

It is not (possible) for a man that Allah gives him the Book, the wisdom and the prophethood, then he starts saying to the people "Be my worshippers aside from Allah" rather, (he would say), "Be men of the Lord; as you have been teaching the Book, and as you have been learning it." [79]

Nor is it (possible for him) that he bids you to hold the angels and the prophets as Lords. Shall he bid you to disbelief, after your having become Muslims? [80]

Commentary

It was during the presence of the deputation from Najrān that

some Jews and Christians had said: 'O Muḥammad, do you want us to worship you the way Christians worship Jesus, son of Mary?' He said: 'I seek refuge with Allah that we worship someone other than Allah or call on others to do so. Allah Almighty has not sent us to do that.' Thereupon, this verse was revealed.

The infallibility of the Prophets

The verse implies that a person whom Allah invests with the Book, the Wisdom and the power of making decisions, and places him on the great station of prophethood is always faithful to his mission when he communicates the Divine message to people and calls on them to become His faithful servants. That he starts moving people away from the worship of only one God and starts asking them to become his own worshippers or the worshippers of some other creatures is something he can never do. If so, this would mean that the one whom Allah had sent as his messenger did not, in fact, deserve this designation. Any government of this world, when appointing someone to an office of responsibility, always takes two factors into consideration:

1. Does the incumbent have the ability to comprehend and execute government policy?

2. How far can he be expected to execute government directives, and to hold its subjects in a stable stance of loyalty? No king or parliament would ever appoint someone as its representative or ambassador about whom there exists the least doubt of indulging in anti-government activity, or deviation from its policy or directives. However, it is possible that the government may have failed to make a correct assessment of a person's ability or loyalty. But with Allah even that element of doubt does not exist. If He knows about a man that he would not over-step the bounds of loyalty and obedience to Him, even in the slightest degree, then it is impossible that he could, later on, prove to be contrary to that assessment. Otherwise, it would mean that Divine knowledge is defective (we seek refuge with Allah!) Right from here, the question of the '*iṣmah*'¹ (infallibility) of the prophets, عليهم السلام, becomes clear. Now that the blessed prophets are free of mi-

1. '*iṣmah*' means a special protection given to someone by Allah which makes him refrain from sins. For the purpose of brevity we may translate it as 'infallibility' - editor.

nor sins, how can the probability of doing *shirk* (the major sin of associating others with Allah) or making revolt against Allah remain valid?

In this, there is the necessary refutation of the Christians who claimed that it was Masīḥ عليه السلام who asked them to have belief in his sonship and godhead. Also chastised were the Muslims who had gone to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم trying to find out if it was all right for them to prostrate before him rather than greet him with the usual *salām*. Also admonished were the people of the Book who had invested their rabbis and monks with the station of God. Refuge with Allah! (Tafsīr 'Usmānī)

Verses 81 - 84

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ النَّبِيِّينَ لَمَا آتَيْتُكُمْ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَحِكْمَةٍ ثُمَّ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مُصَدِّقٌ لِمَا مَعَكُمْ لَتُؤْمِنُنَّ بِهِ وَلَتَنْصُرُنَّهُ قَالَ أَأَقْرَرْتُمْ وَأَخَذْتُمْ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكُمْ إِصْرِي قَالُوا أَقْرَرْنَا قَالَ فَاشْهَدُوا وَأَنَا مَعَكُمْ مِنَ الشَّاهِدِينَ ﴿٨١﴾ فَمَنْ تَوَلَّىٰ بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾ أَفَغَيْرَ دِينِ اللَّهِ يَبْعُونَ وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾ قُلْ أَمَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَالنَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

﴿٨٤﴾

And when Allah made the prophets take pledge: (saying) "If I give you a book and wisdom, then comes to you a messenger verifying what is with you, you shall have to believe in him and you shall have to support him." He said, "Do you affirm and accept my covenant in this respect?" They said, "We affirm." He said, "Then, bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses." [81]

Then those who turn back after this they are the sin-

ful.[82]

Are they, then, seeking a faith other than that of Allah while to Him alone submits whosoever there is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwilling, and to Him they shall be returned? [83]

Say, "We believe in Allah and in what has been revealed to us and in what was revealed to Ibrāhīm, Ismā'īl, Ishāq, Ya'qūb and the descendants, and in what has been given to Mūsā, 'Isā (Jesus) and the prophets, from their Lord: We do not differentiate between any of them. And to Him we submit ourselves." [84]

Commentary

Three Covenants with Allah Almighty

There are three kinds of pledges Allah Almighty has taken from His servants:

1. One of them has been mentioned in Sūrah al-A'rāf (الاعراف) under *alastu bi rabbikum* (Am I not your Lord? - 7:172) The purpose of this pledge was to bring round the whole human community to believe in the being of God and in His universal Lordship since the whole edifice of religion rests on this very corner-stone. Unless this belief is there, the lead given by reason and reflection can be of no positive use in the field of religion. Additional details on this subject will, *inshallah*, appear where due.

2. The second pledge is mentioned in verse 187 of the present Sūrah in the following words:

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ لَتُبَيِّنُنَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَكْتُمُونَهُ

And when Allah took pledge from those who were given the Book: "You shall make it known to people, and you shall not conceal it." (3:18)

This pledge was taken exclusively from the 'ulamā' (religious scholars) of the people of the Book asking them not to hide the truth but to state it clearly and openly.

3. The third pledge has been described in the present verse:

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ النَّبِيِّينَ لَمَا آتَيْنُكُمْ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَحِكْمَةٍ

And when Allah made the prophets take pledge: (saying) "If I

give you a book and wisdom... (3:81)

The purpose and place of the pledge

To answer as to where did this third pledge take place, it can be said that it either took place in the spiritual world on a metaphysical plane or in our physical world by means of revelation. Both are probable. (Bayān al-Qur'ān)

As for the meaning of *Mithāq* (pledge) the Holy Qur'ān has itself mentioned its contents. However, with regard to the relevant subject of this pledge, sayings differ. Sayyidnā 'Alī and Ibn 'Abbās رضى الله عنهما say that this was about the Last Prophet, صلى الله عليه وسلم. It means that Allah Almighty had taken this pledge from all prophets solely in respect of Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم. The pledge was that they should, if they appear in his blessed time, believe in him, give him help and support, and leave behind instructions for their respective communities to do the same.

Ṭa'wūs, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Qatādah (رحمهم الله) say that this pledge was taken from the prophets so that they help and support each other mutually. (Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr)

This later statement can also be substantiated from what Allah Almighty has said in Sūrah al-Aḥzāb:

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ مِيثَاقَهُمْ وَمِنْكَ وَمِنْ نُوحٍ وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ وَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُمْ مِيثَاقًا غَلِيظًا (الاحزاب)

And when We took from the prophets their pledge, and from you, and from Nuḥ and Ibrāhīm and Mūsā and 'Isā son of Maryam - and We took from them a firm pledge. (33:7)

This is because the pledge was taken in order that they support and attest each other. (Tafsīr Aḥmadī)

In reality, there is no contradiction in the two explanations cited above, therefore, both can be brought to bear on the meaning. (Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr)

There may be a doubt here. One may say that Allah Almighty is All-Knowing and All-Aware. He certainly knows that Muḥammad ﷺ will not be appearing in this world during the presence of any prophet. If so, asking prophets to believe in him seems to be of no use. But, a

little deliberation would bring its usefulness into clear focus. One will realize that the moment they declare a firm intention to believe, as commanded by Allah Almighty, in the prophethood of Sayyidnā Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم, the paradigm of most sublime attributes, it will be right from that point of time that they will become entitled to Divine blessings. (Sāwī vide Jalālayn)

The final and universal prophethood

In verse 81 beginning with the words: **وَإِذْ أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِنْ النَّبِيِّينَ** (And when Allah made the prophets take pledge:), it has been clearly stated that Allah Almighty took a firm pledge from all prophets, which was: When, during your lifetime there comes another prophet - who will certainly reaffirm the message of past prophets and their books - then, it is necessary for the prophet who is present at that time that he not only believes personally in the veracity and prophethood of the new prophet but also instructs others to do so. From this absolute rule set by the Qur'an, it becomes very clear that Allah Almighty must have taken a pledge from the prophets about Sayyidnā Muḥammad ﷺ as well, quite similar to what 'Allamah al-Subkī has stated in his treatise entitled *التعظيم والملة فى لتومن به ولتنصرنه*. He says: 'In this verse, the word, *rasūl* (messenger) refers to Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم; and there has never been a prophet from whom Allah Almighty had not taken the pledge to believe in his prophethood and provide help and support to him; and there has not been one single prophet who did not bequeath to his community the legacy of believing in and helping and supporting him; and, if the noble prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had appeared during the times of the prophets, it is he who would have been the prophet to (be obeyed by) all of them, and all of them would have been part of his community.'

This tells us that his status is not restricted to his being simply the prophet of his community; he is the prophet of prophets as well. So, he himself says in a hadīth: 'If Mūsā (Moses) was living today, he too would have had no option but to follow me.'

At yet another occasion, he said: 'When 'Īsā عليه السلام (Jesus) will come, he too will act in accordance with the noble Qur'an and the rules set forth by your prophet'. (Tafsīr ibn Kathīr)

Thus, from here we learn that his prophethood is 'universal and in-

clusive' and that all previous religious codes stand absorbed in his Shari'ah. What is being said here also brings into a bright focus the correct meaning of his saying: بُعِثْتُ إِلَى النَّاسِ كَافَّةً (I have been sent to all human beings). It shows that taking this hadīth to mean that his prophethood extends from his time to the Day of Judgement is not correct. Instead, the time duration of his prophethood is so extensive that it begins before the prophethood of Sayyidnā Ādam عليه السلام as the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has himself said in a hadīth: كُنتُ نَبِيًّا وَآدَمُ بَيْنَ الرُّوحِ وَالْجَسَدِ (I was a prophet even when Ādam was in a state between spirit and body). That he will be the first to step forward for intercession on the Day of Resurrection, and that the entire progeny of Ādam عليه السلام will assemble under his flag and that he led the prayers at a congregation of all prophets in Bayt al-Maqdis on the Night of Ascenst (Mi'rāj) are all signs of this leadership which is great and universal.

Verse 85

وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعْ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ
مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾

And whoever seeks a faith other than Islām, it will never be accepted from him, and he, in the Hereafter, is among the losers. [85]

Commentary

The literal meaning of 'Islām' is 'submission and obedience.' As a term 'Islām' stands for submission to that particular religion which Allah Almighty has sent through his prophets to guide human beings, because fundamental principles are the same in the religious codes of all prophets عليهم السلام .

Correspondingly, there are occasions when 'Islām' is used in that general sense, while there are other occasions when it is used exclusively to identify the Last Shari'ah which was revealed to the Last of the Prophets عليهم السلام . Both these kinds of application are present in the Holy Qur'ān. That the past prophets called themselves 'Muslim' and their communities, the 'Muslim' community, stands proved under the authority of several wordings of the Qur'ānic text. Concurrently, this name has also been used as a particular name of the community the Last of the Prophets:

هُوَ سَمَّاكُمْ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَفِي هَذَا

It was He who named you Muslims before, and in this (Qur'an). (22:78)

In short, every Divine religion which came through a prophet is also called 'Islām'. Then, it is also used as a particular title for the Muslim community. Now, the question is as to which sense does the word, 'Islām', carry at this place in the Holy Qur'an?

The correct position is that, no matter which of the two meanings is taken, it does not make much of a difference in terms of the outcome, since the name of 'Islām' given to the religion of past prophets was for a limited group of people and a specified period of time.

That was the 'Islām' of that time. Restricted to the specific group or community, that 'Islām' was not meant to serve as a universal code for all times to come. As such when a particular prophet departed and was replaced by another prophet, 'Islām' (i.e. the specific code) of that time ceased to be operative. The 'Islām' of the said time was to be what the new prophet presented. Obviously, there was no difference between these different codes in so far as the fundamentals are concerned, however, the subsidiary injunctions might differ. As for the 'Islām' given through the last Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, it will remain un-abrogable and will serve as a permanent code right upto the Day of Judgment. And, in accordance with the cited rule, all previous religions stand abrogated after the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been sent.

Now, they are not Islām as such anymore. Instead, Islām is the name of that particular religion which has reached us through the Holy Prophet, Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā صلى الله عليه وسلم. Therefore, it appears in authentic *aḥādīth* that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: 'Had Mūsā been living this day, following me would have been incumbent upon him too.' In yet another *ḥadīth*, he has been reported to have said that 'Īsā, when he appears close to the Day of Resurrection, he too, inspite of holding his distinction and office of prophethood, would follow no other religious code except that of his (the Prophet of Islām).

Therefore, at this place, no matter what sense is taken of Islām - the general or the particular - the outcome of both is the same, that is,

after the coming of the Last of the Prophets, عليهم السلام, only that religion, and that alone, will be termed as Islām which has come to the world through him. On belief in that alone depends the salvation (*najāt*) of all human beings for it is their indispensable need. This explains what has been said in the present verse: 'Whoever seeks a faith other than Islām, it will never be accepted from him.'

Details about this subject have already appeared under the commentary on the verse (3:19).

Verses 86 - 91

كَيْفَ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ قَوْمًا كَفَرُوا بَعْدَ إِيمَانِهِمْ وَشَهِدُوا أَنَّ
الرَّسُولَ حَقٌّ وَجَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ
﴿٨٦﴾ أُولَئِكَ جَزَاءُ هُمْ أَنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ لَعْنَةَ اللَّهِ وَالْمَلَكَةِ وَالنَّاسِ
أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يَخَفُّ عَنْهُمْ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ
يُنْظَرُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ وَأَصْلَحُوا فَإِنَّ
اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٨٩﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بَعْدَ إِيمَانِهِمْ ثُمَّ
ازْدَادُوا كُفْرًا لَنْ تُقْبَلَ تَوْبَتُهُمْ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الضَّالُّونَ ﴿٩٠﴾ إِنَّ
الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَمَاتُوا وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْ أَحَدِهِمْ مِلْءُ
الْأَرْضِ ذَهَبًا وَلَوْ افْتَدَى بِهِ أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ وَمَالَهُمْ
مِنْ نُصْرِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

How shall Allah give guidance to a people who disbelieved after they had accepted Faith and testified that the Prophet is true and the clear signs had come to them? And Allah does not give guidance to the unjust people. [86] The punishment of such people is that upon them is the curse of Allah, and of the angels and of the human beings altogether. [87]

They remain under it forever. Neither will the punishment be lightened for them, nor will they be given respite, [88] except those who repent afterwards and mend their ways; then, Allah is All-Forgiving, Very-

Merciful.[89]

Those who disbelieve after having accepted Faith and then increase in disbelief, their repentance shall never be accepted. And they are the ones who have lost the right path. [90]

Those who disbelieve and die as disbelievers, even an Earth-full of gold shall never be accepted from any of them, even if one were to offer it as ransom. They are the ones for whom there is a painful punishment, and for them there are no helpers. [91]

Commentary

The removal of a doubt:

On a superficial view of the verse **كَيْفَ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ** : 'How shall Allah give guidance...' (86), there emerges a doubt that whoever turns an apostate receives no guidance afterwards, although, the fact is contrary to this. There are many who, after having become apostates, re-embrace the faith and become recipients of guidance.

The answer is that the withholding of guidance mentioned here is in accordance with common usage. For instance, some criminal when punished by a certain ruler may say, 'I have been given a special treatment by the ruler with his own hands.' And in answer to him, it is said: 'Why are we going to give a special treatment to such a criminal?' That is, there is just no special treatment called for in this case, while it does not mean that such a person cannot, in any way, become deserving of special treatment even if he behaved well. (Bayān al-Qur'ān)

Verse 92

**لَنْ تَتَالُوا الْبِرَّ حَتَّى تُنْفِقُوا مِمَّا تُحِبُّونَ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ شَيْءٍ
فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٩٢﴾**

You shall never attain righteousness unless you spend from what you love. And whatsoever you spend, Allah is fully aware of it. [92]

Sequence of Verses

In the previous verse (91), it was said that charity from disbelievers and deniers was not acceptable with Allah. In this verse, believers have been told about acceptable charity and the etiquette governing it.

Commentary

Let us first understand what *birr* : بر means and what it really signifies so that the whole sense of the verse becomes clear in our minds.

The literal and real meaning of the word *birr* : بر is the perfect fulfillment of someone's rights. It is also used in the sense of charity, performance of good deeds and nice conduct. The word *barr* and بار : *bārr* is used for a person who fulfills, fully and totally, all rights due on him. The expression *بِرَّاءُ إِلَىٰ بَنِي* (good to my mother - 19:32) and *بِرَّاءُ إِلَىٰ أَبِي* (good to his father and mother - 19:14) has been used in the Qur'ān in this very sense. It has been used there as a personal attribute of prophets who fulfilled the rights of their parents fully and perfectly.

The plural form of this very word *barr* is ابرار : *abrār* which has been used frequently in the Qur'ān. It has been said:

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ يَشْرَبُونَ مِنْ كَأْسٍ كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا كَافُورًا

Surely the righteous shall drink of a cup the mixture of which is camphor - 76:5.

Again at another place it is said:

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ يُنْظَرُونَ

Surely the righteous shall be in bliss, upon furnished thrones gazing - 83:22,23.

yet again there is:

وَأِنَّ الْفُجَّارَ لَفِي جَحِيمٍ

And surely, the sinners shall be in hell ablaze - 82:14.

The last verse above also tells us that the antonym of *birr* : بر is *fujūr* : فُجُور (disobedience, sinfulness).

In al-Ādab al-Mufrad of Imām al-Bukhārī and in Ibn Mājah and the Musnad of Aḥmad, it has been reported from Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: 'Stick to speaking the truth because truth is a companion of *birr* : *birr* (righteousness) and both these are in Paradise; and abstain from lying because that is a companion of *fujūr* (sin) and both these are in Hell.'

The verse 177 of Sūrah al-Baqarah (2) says:

لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ
وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ

Righteousness is not that you turn your faces to the East and the West; but righteousness is that one believes in Allah and the last Day... 2:177.

After giving a list of good deeds in this verse, all of them have been classed as *birr* : *birr* (righteousness). The subject verse also tells us that, of the wide range of righteous deeds, the most preferred form of righteousness is to spend the most cherished things in the way of Allah. The verse further tells us 'you can never claim to have righteousness unless you spend out of what you hold dear.' Thus the meaning is that the perfect fulfillment of the the rights of Allah Almighty and a total self-unburdening from it cannot come to pass unless we spend in the way of Allah what we hold dear to our hearts. This very perfect fulfillment of due rights has also been translated as 'perfect good' or 'excellence in doing good' or 'the great merit'. To sum up, the sense here is that entering the ranks of the '*abrār*' (the righteous) depends on sacrificing in the way of Allah that which one holds dear.

The enthusiastic obedience of *Ṣaḥābah*

The noble Companions رضى الله عنهم اجمعين who were the first addressees of the Qur'ānic injunctions and the direct disciples of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم really loved to carry out the injunctions of the Qur'ān in letter and spirit. When this verse was revealed, each one of them surveyed as to what they loved most out of what they had. Consequently, requests started coming before the Holy Prophet ﷺ that these be spent in the way of Allah. Sayyidnā Abū Ṭalḥah رضى الله عنه was the richest person among the *Anṣār* (the helping residents) of Madi-nah. He was the owner of a fruit farm located right across the mosque of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. It had a well called *Bi'r Ḥā'*. Now, in place of this farm, there is, in front of Bāb al-Majīdī, a building known as *Istifā Manzil* where pilgrims to Madinah stay. But, in a corner north-east from it, this *Bi'r Ḥā'* still exists by the same name.¹ The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم used to visit this farm once in a while and

1. This building and well have now been demolished due to the extension of the Mosque. (Translator)

drink water drawn from *Bi'r Hā'*. He liked the water from this well. This farm belonging to Sayyidnā Ṭalḥah was very precious, fertile, and the dearest of all that he owned. After the revelation of this verse, he presented himself before the Holy Prophet ﷺ and said: 'I hold *Bi'r Hā'* the dearest of all that I own. I wish to 'spend' it in the way of Allah. I request you to use it for whatever purpose you like.' He said: 'That farm is a high-yield property. I think it is appropriate that you distribute it among your kith and kin.' Sayyidnā Abū Ṭalḥah, accepting the suggestion made by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم distributed it among his relatives and cousins (al-Bukhārī and Muslim). This ḥadīth also tells us that charity is not restricted to spending on the poor and the needy, but it is equally charitable and meritorious to give it to one's own family and relatives.

Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Ḥāritha رضى الله عنه came with a horse and said that he loved it more than anything else he owned and that he wanted to 'spend' it in the way of Allah. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم accepted it. But, after having taken it from him, he gave it to his son Sayyidnā Usāmah رضى الله عنه. Zayd ibn Ḥāritha was somewhat disappointed about that thinking that his charity has found its way back into his own home. But, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم comforted him by saying: 'Allah Almighty has accepted this charity of yours'. (Tafsīr Mazharī vide Ibn Jarīr, and others)

Sayyidnā 'Umar رضى الله عنه had a bond-maid he liked most. He freed her for the sake of Allah.

Similarly, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar had a bond-maid he loved. He freed her in the name of Allah.

In short, the gist of the verse under reference is that the complete fulfillment of the rights of Allah, the perfect good and excellence in doing good can be achieved only when a person spends something out of his dearest belongings in the way of Allah. Worthy of our attention and retention are some of the following aspects highlighted in this verse:

The word *birr* in this verses is inclusive of all charity, obligatory or voluntary:

1. First of all, this verse motivates spending in the way of Allah.

Some commentators take this to mean obligatory charity such as *zakaḥ* while others take this to be voluntary (*Nafl*: supererogatory) charity. But, according to a consensus of respected researchers in the field, it has been established that its sense is general and includes both obligatory and voluntary charities. Then there are the recorded actions of the noble Companions, as cited above, which bear witness that these charitable initiatives taken by them were voluntary.

Therefore, the sense of the verse is that you give in the way of Allah whatever it may be, the obligatory *zakāh* or the voluntary charity, but that perfect excellence and merit will blossom out from them only when you spend in the way of Allah what you like and love. Not that you pick out the spare, the useless or worthless things as if you were trying to get rid of the burden of charity and as if it was some sort of punitive tax on you. This subject has been taken up more clearly in another verse of the Qur'an which is as follows:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْفِقُوا مِنْ طَيِّبَاتِ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ وَرِمَّا أَخْرَجْنَا لَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ
وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْخَيْبَتِ مِنْهُ تُنْفِقُونَ وَلَكُنْتُمْ بِإِخْذِهِ إِلَّا أَنْ تُغْمِضُوا فِيهِ

O those who believe, spend of the the good things you have earned and of what We have brought forth for you from the earth and do not opt for a bad thing spending only from there while you are not going to accept it at all unless you close your eyes to it... - 2:267.

So, the outcome is that picking out the bad and the useless to give in charity is unacceptable; contrary to that is the acceptable charity which earns full merit and which is nothing but what is spent out of one's dear belongings.

Moderation in charity:

2. The second ruling comes out of the hint made in the word *مِنْ* (from what) in the verse. That is, the purpose is not to spend away everything one likes and loves *en masse* in the way of Allah. Instead, the purpose is to spend whatever has to be spent from the good things. Spending in this way will bring the full reward of charity.

In charity, what counts is sincerity:

3. The third ruling is that spending the cherished is not tied to spending something of high value. Instead, by spending what one likes

and holds dear, no matter how small it may be in quantity or cost, one would still become deserving of this '*birr*' or righteousness. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī says, 'Whoever spends sincerely for the good pleasure of Allah, even if that be a single date-fruit alone, that too is good enough to make one deserving of the great merit and perfect righteousness promised in the verse.'

Alternative for those who have nothing to spend:

4. On the outside, it appears from the verse that poor people who do not have much to spend will remain deprived of the great good and righteousness mentioned here. It is because it has been said in the verse that this great good cannot be achieved without spending one's cherished belonging while the poor and the needy just do not have anything through which they could reach the station of righteousness. But, a little deliberation would show that the verse does not mean that those who wish to have the great good and the great merit cannot achieve that by any means other than that of spending out of their cherished possessions. Contrary to that, the fact is that this great good can be achieved by some other means as well; such as, *Tbādah*, *Dhikr*, *Tilāwah* of the Qur'ān and abundance of *nawāfil*. Therefore, the poor and the needy can also become the recipients of this great good through other means as it has been clearly explained in Ḥadīth narrations.

What is meant by things you love?

5. This is the fifth question. Another verse of the Qur'ān tells us that something liked and loved means that the thing is working for him and that he needs it, not that it be spare and useless. The Holy Qur'ān says: *وَيُطْعَمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَى حُبِّهِمْ* which means that "the favoured servants of Allah feed the poor although they need it themselves." (76:08) Similarly, in yet another verse, this subject has been further clarified as follows: *وَيُؤْتُونَ عَلَى أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ* They (the favoured servants of Allah) prefer others over their own selves even though they themselves are in need. (59:09)

Spending the extra and the spare too is not devoid of merit:

6. The sixth ruling given in this verse is that entry into the fold of perfect good, great merit and ranks of the righteous depends on spending one's cherished possessions in the way of Allah. But, it does not

necessarily follow that there is just no merit in store for one who does spend out of what is extra to his needs. On the contrary, as it is said towards the end of the verse: "وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ" that is, 'And whatsoever you spend, Allah is fully aware of it,' the sense of the text in the verse is that while the achievement of the perfect good and entry into the ranks of the righteous, no doubt, depends on spending cherished possessions specially; however, no charity is devoid of merit irrespective of whether one spends the cherished or the extra. But, what is certainly undesirable and prohibited is getting into the habit of always picking out the extra and the bad to spend in the way of Allah. But, a person who not only spends good things he likes in charity but also gives away things which are extra to his needs, e.g., left-over food or used clothing, defective utensils or articles in use, does commit no sin by including these in his acts of charity. He would definitely earn a reward for those too. As far as spending of cherished possessions is concerned, he would thereupon achieve the great good and find his entry into the ranks of the righteous as well.

Also stated in this last sentence of the verse is that Allah is fully aware of the real quality of what man spends and knows whether or not it is dear to him, and if he is spending it for the good pleasure of Allah, or for pretense and publicity. The mere verbal claim by somebody that he is spending what he cherishes in the way of Allah is not enough for this purpose. Keeping vigil over him is the One, the all-Knowing, the all-Aware who is cognizant of the secrets of the heart - He is watching and knows what is the true worth of the spending in His way.

Verses 93 - 95

كُلُّ الطَّعَامِ كَانَ حَلَالًا لِّبَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ إِلَّا مَا حَرَّمَ إِسْرَءِيلُ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تُنَزَّلَ التَّوْرَةُ ۖ قُلْ فَاتَّبِعُوا بِالتَّوْرَةِ فَاتْلُوهَا إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٩٣﴾ فَمَنْ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٩٤﴾ قُلْ صَدَقَ اللَّهُ ۖ فَاتَّبِعُوا مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا ۖ وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ



Every (kind of) food was lawful for the children of Isrā'īl, except what Isrā'īl had made unlawful for himself well before the Torah was revealed. Say, "Then, bring the Torah and recite it, if you are true." [93]

Then, after all this, those who forge the lie and attribute it to Allah, they are the transgressors. [94]

Say, "Allah has spoken the truth. So, follow the Faith of Ibrāhīm, the upright -- and he was not one of the associators." [95]

Commentary

In the verses appearing above, there is a continuity of arguments against positions taken by the people of the Book. At some places, it concerns Jews and at others, the Christians. One such argument, which has been reported in Rūh al-Ma'ānī on the authority of Wāhidī and al-Kalbī, recounts the incident when the Holy Prophet ﷺ stated his adherence to the community of Abraham with reference to all fundamentals of the religious code, and most of the subsidiaries, the Jews objected by saying: 'You eat camel meat and partake of its milk although these were unlawful for Abraham.' The Holy Prophet ﷺ said: 'No, this was lawful for him.' The Jews said: 'All that we consider unlawful has continued to be unlawful since the days of Naoh and Abraham to the point that this unlawfulness reached us.' Thereupon, Allah Almighty revealed the verse: كُلُّ الطَّعَامِ كَانَ حَلَالًا لِّبَنِي إِسْرَآئِيلَ. 'Every (kind of) food was lawful for the children of Isrā'īl - 93' to refute the Jewish claim in which it is said that before the revelation of Torah, all things were lawful for the children of Isrā'īl except the camel meat which Isrā'īl (Jacob) عليه السلام himself had denied to eat for a particular reason, and then it remained unlawful for his progeny also.

The fact, as narrated by Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās in an authentic report, is that Jacob suffered from Sciatica. He had taken a vow that he would abandon what he liked most in what he ate if Allah Almighty cured him of the disease. He was cured and camel meat was what he liked most, so he abandoned it. (See Al-Hākim and al-Tirmidhī as quoted by Rūh al-Ma'ānī). Then, it so happened that this prohibition which started because of a vow continued among the Banī Isrā'īl as a divine injunc-

tion. It seems their code recognized a vow as a cause of unlawfulness of something lawful, like in our own Shari'ah, a vow may make the permissible acts as obligatory. However, a vow or pledge which renders things unlawful is, in reality, an oath which is not permissible in our Shari'ah. In fact, in such a case, it is obligatory to break the oath and make amends by making *Kaffarah*. This is in accordance with what Allah Almighty has said in the verse **لِمَ تُحَرِّمُ مَا أَحَلَّ اللَّهُ لَكَ** (... why do you forbid what Allah has made lawful for you? - 66:1) (See al-Tafsir al-Kabir)

Verse 96

إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا وَهُدًى
لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٩٦﴾

The first house set up for the people is surely the one in Makkah having blessings and guidance for all worlds. [96]

Commentary:

The above verse points out to the distinction and superiority of the House of Allah, the Ka'bah, as compared to the houses, and even mosques, of the whole world. There are several reasons for this status, which have been mentioned in this verse, namely:

1. Among the true houses of worship in this world, the Ka'bah enjoys the distinction of being the first.
2. It is full of blessings.
3. It is a source of guidance for the entire world.

The gist of the words used in the verse is that the first House designated for people by Allah is none other than the one which is in Makkah. It means that the Ka'bah of Makkah is the first House of Worship in this world. One possible interpretation of this phrase may be that the first house of all the houses of the world was made for Divine worship exclusively, in which case, there would have been no place of worship or place of residence prior to it. Ādam عليه السلام was a prophet of Allah. Given his stature and the eminent position as Allah's vicegerent, it is likely that he, soon after his appearance on the earth, elected to first build the House of Allah even before building his own

residence. It is for this reason that Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar, Mujāhid, Qatādah and others from among the Companions and their successors are of the opinion that the Ka'bah is the first house of the world. Then, it is also possible that houses where people lived may have already been made earlier but this may have been the first ever House made exclusively for worship. This very view has been reported from Sayyidnā 'Alī رضي الله عنه .

Al-Baihaqi, in his book, Dalā'il al-Nubūwwah, has reported on the authority of Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Ās رضي الله عنه that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: 'After the arrival of Sayyidnā Ādam and Sayyidah Hawwā' عليهما السلام into the mortal world, Allah Almighty commanded them through angel Jibra'il that they should build the House of Allah (the Ka'bah). After they had fulfilled the command, they were asked to go round it (in *tawāf*). They were told that they were the first among people and this house was the first House (of worship) appointed for people (Ibn Kathīr).

As it appears in some reports, this structure of the Ka'bah built by Sayyidnā Ādam was there upto the time of Sayyidnā Nūḥ. It collapsed during the Flood and its traces were obliterated. Following that, it was re-built by Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام on the same foundations. When the structure collapsed again due to some accident, a group from the tribe of Jurhum raised it once again. When yet another collapse came, the Amalkites rebuilt it. When it collapsed close to the early period of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, the Quraysh built it all over again in which the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم himself participated and helped place the Black Stone with his blessed hands. But, the structure raised by the Quraysh was a little different from the original foundation laid down by Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm in as much as they had left out a section of the House of Allah which is known as Ḥatīm. There were two doors in the original Abrahamic structure of the Ka'bah, one for entry and another on the back for exit. The Quraysh retained just the one door in the east (for entry and exit).

The third change they made was to raise the level of the entry door much higher than the ground level of the House of Allah so that everybody could not go in there easily; this was to restrict the entry only to those who were permitted by Quraysh. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم

said to Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضى الله عنها : 'I wish I could demolish the present structure and raise it all over again exactly in accordance with the Abrahimic foundation. By doing this I shall be correcting the arbitrary deviation from the Abrahimic foundation made by the Quraysh, but this action is likely to create a misunderstanding among Muslims who are new and whose knowledge is not yet perfect, therefore, I shall leave it as it is for the time being.' The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم did not live for very long to implement his wishes in his lifetime.

But, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Zubayr رضى الله عنه, the nephew of Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضى الله عنها had heard this saying of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. When he came to rule Makkah al-Mukarramah following the *Khulafā al-Rāshidīn*, he had the structure of the House of Allah demolished and had it rebuilt in accordance with the saying of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the original foundation of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام. He ruled Makkah al-Mu'azzamah for a brief period only. The tyrant of the Muslim community, Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf invaded Makkah and Ḥaḍrat 'Abdullāh was martyred. After assuming control of the government, and abhorrent as he was to the idea that this feat of 'Abdullāh ibn Zubayr remains a source of fame for the martyred ruler, he started a smear campaign that 'Abdullāh ibn Zubayr was wrong in what he did and that the Ka'bah should be kept the way it was left to posterity by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. Using this excuse, he once again demolished the structure of the House of Allah and had it built anew similar to the one made earlier by the Quraysh during the days of *Jāhiliyyah*. Some Muslim rulers who succeeded Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf intended, on the strength of the aforementioned ḥadīth, to rebuild the House of Allah all over again in accordance with the ḥadīth of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. But, the master-jurist of that period, Sayyidnā Imām Mālik ibn Anas gave a *fatwā* to the effect that re-demolishing and re-building the House of Allah at this stage will render the House of Allah a plaything in the hands of rulers who will follow. Every ruler who comes next will do exactly this to earn fame for himself. Therefore, it is appropriate that it be left the way it is. The entire *ummah* accepted it. This is the reason why the structure built by Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf is what remains even to this day. There have been damages, dilapidations and the process of repairs has continued ever since.

These narrations, first of all, tell us that the Ka'bah is the first house of the world, or at least, the first house of worship. While the Holy Qur'ān does mention that the House of Allah was built by Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm and Ismā'il following His will and command, there are simultaneous indicators suggesting that these revered prophets did not go through the initial layout for its construction. Instead, they built it in accordance with previous foundations, because the real foundation of the Ka'bah was already there. From what is said in the Holy Qur'ān, i.e. **وَاِذْ يَرْفَعُ اِبْرٰهٖمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمٰعِيْلُ** (and when Ibrāhīm was raising up the foundations of the House along with Ismā'il - 2:127) we get an indication that 'the *Qawā'id* or the foundations of the House of Allah were already there. It appears in Sūrah al-Hajj: **وَاِذْ يَبْنٰوْنَ لِاِبْرٰهٖمَ مَكَانَ الْبَيْتِ** (and when we settled for Ibrāhīm the site of the House - 22:26)

This too is suggestive of the fact that the site of the House of Allah had continued as pre-determined since earlier times. The first verse lends support to the view that its foundations were already there.

When Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام was commanded to build the House of Allah, as in some reports, he was led by an angel on to the site of the Ka'bah and its previously existing foundations hidden under sand dunes.

In any case, the verse under reference does prove one of the merits of the Ka'bah, that is, it is the first ever house or place of worship. It has been reported in a ḥadīth from the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* that Sayyidnā Ab Dharr رضى الله عنه asked the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, 'Which is the first ever *masjid* in the world?' He said, 'al-Masjid al-Haram.' He submitted again, 'Which *masjid* comes after that?' He said, 'Masjid Bayt al-Maqdis.' He asked once again, 'What time span separates their building?' He said, 'Forty years.'

In this *ḥadīth*, it is in relation to the new edifice of the House of Allah that the intervening period between its construction and the initial construction of Bayt al-Maqdis has been determined. As a matter of fact, there are reports which prove that the initial construction of Bayt al-Maqdis was undertaken by Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام forty years after the construction of the Ka'bah. Then comes the construction of Bayt al-Maqdis by Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام. This too was not a new structure with new foundations, like the Ka'bah. Instead, Sayyid-

nā Sulaymān عليه السلام rebuilt it on the original Abrahimic foundations. Thus, there remains no contradiction between reports.

The Ka'bah has always been an object of reverence and respect. This fact is pointed out in the expression **ثَوْبَعٌ لِلنَّاسِ** (set up for the people) in this verse under discussion hinted therein is that the respect and honour in which this House of worship is held will not be limited to a particular nation or group. Instead, the whole humanity will hold it in respect. Allah Almighty has placed a built-in aura of dignity and awe in its presence which draws in the hearts of people automatically.

Here, the word '*Bakkah*' means 'Makkah al-Mu'azzamah'. It does not matter whether you say that the letter '*mīm*' has been substituted for '*bā*' since, in common Arab usage, '*mīm*' is substituted for '*bā*', or simply say that '*Bakkah*' is an alternate name for 'Makkah'.

The Blessings of the Ka'bah

The second merit of Baytullah (the Ka'bah) stated here in this verse is that it is blessed. The word, '*mubārak*' has been derived from '*barakah*' which means 'to grow' and 'to sustain'. You can look at this growth factor from two angles. Something may grow in a way that it visibly increases in quantity, but the other possible way of growing is that it adds nothing noteworthy to its quantity, yet it turns out to be so useful in so many situations that it would have usually needed much more to do the same job. In that sense this too could be regarded as 'growth' or 'increase'.

The Ka'bah is full of blessings outwardly and inwardly. The outward blessings it has are quite obvious. In spite of Makkah and its environs being a desert, dry and barren, all sorts of fruits and vegetables and items of need are available in all seasons and at all times. Not only that these are enough for the people of Makkah, it is much more than that. These suffice for all visitors from everywhere in the world. And everyone knows the volume of visitors, specially during the Hajj season, when hundreds and thousands of people from the farthest corners of the world assemble there whose count outnumbers the residents of Makkah by at least four or five times. This huge multitude of people stays there, not for a few days, but for months together. Even, apart from the Hajj season, there is hardly a time of the year when thousands of people from outside do not come in and go out of here. It

may be noted that, during the Hajj season particularly when hundreds and thousands of people from outside assemble there, it has never happened that articles of use could have gone out of the market and become unavailable. Even, animals of sacrifice which are slaughtered there by each and every person, at least on the average of one per person, and there are some who sacrifice more, are always available there. It is not that special arrangements are made to import these from other countries. In the words of the Holy Qur'an, i.e. **يُجِبِلُ الْبَرَّ نَمْرَاتُ كُلِّ** (Brought toward it are fruits of everything - 28:57), there is a clear indication of this phenomena.

This was a view of the outward blessings which, of course, are not the ultimate objective. The spiritual, the inward blessings are so numerous that it is impossible to count them. There are important *'ibādāt*, the acts of worship, which are special to the Ka'bah. The great reward and the spiritual blessings that come from them totally revolve around the Baytullah, such as the Hajj and 'Umra. Then, there are some other *'ibādāt* the merit of which increases several degrees when done in al-Masjid al-Ḥaram. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said that a man offering *ṣalāh* at his home will get *thawāb* for one *ṣalāh*; and if he does that in the *masjid* of his locality, he will get the reward for twenty five *ṣalāhs*; and one who does that in a *Jāmi'* (big congregational mosque) will get the reward for five hundred *ṣalāhs*; and should he offer his *ṣalāh* in al-Masjid al-Aqṣā, he will get the reward for one thousand *ṣalāhs*; and in my *Masjid*, he gets the *thawāb* for fifty thousand *ṣalāhs*, while in al-Masjid al-Ḥaram, that of one hundred thousand *ṣalāhs*. (This narration has been reported by Ibn Mājah and Ṭahāwī and others).

As far as the merits of *Hajj* are concerned, Muslims generally know the Ḥadīth which declares that a Muslim who performs his Hajj obligations correctly is so cleansed of his past sins as if he was born on that day, all pure and pristine. Obviously, all these are spiritual blessings of the Baytullah. These very blessings have been identified by the word **مُبَارَكًا** towards the end of the verse: **مُبَارَكًا وَمُهَيْمِنًا** (having blessings and guidance for all worlds).

Verse 97

فِيهِ آيَاتٌ بَيِّنَاتٌ مَّقَامُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمَنْ دَخَلَهُ كَانَ آمِنًا وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى
النَّاسِ حُجُّ الْبَيْتِ مَنِ اسْتَطَاعَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلًا وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ
اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٩٧﴾

In it there are clear signs: The station of Ibrāhīm! And whoever enters there is secure. And as a right of Allah, it is obligatory on the people to perform Ḥajj of the House -- whoever has the ability to manage (his) way to it. And if one disbelieves, then Allah is independent of all the worlds. [97]

Commentary

Three distinctions of Baytullah

Related in this verse are distinctions and merits of the House of Allah, that is, the Ka'bah. Firstly, it has many signs of Allah's power, one of them being the station of Ibrāhīm (Maqāmu Ibrāhīm). Secondly, one who enters there becomes a recipient of peace and remains protected; he cannot be killed by anybody. Thirdly, it is obligatory on all Muslims around the world that they make the Ḥajj of the House of Allah, subject to the condition that one has the means and the ability to reach as far as there.

The signs of Allah's Power:

Since the time the foundations of Baytullah were laid out, Allah Almighty has, because of its enormous blessings provided protection to the people of Makkah against enemy attacks. When Abrahah invaded Makkah with his army of elephants, Allah Almighty, in His most perfect power, destroyed them through birds. Those who enter the sacred precincts of Makkah, men and women, even animals, stand protected.

When there is rainfall on a certain side of Baytullah, it has been observed that countries situated on that side are favoured with substantial rainfalls. Another unusual sign relates to the Jamarāt, the granite pillars on which every pilgrim throws seven pebbles each, everyday for three days. A couple of million or more pilgrims go there every year. Had these pebbles remained there, the Jamarāt would have been buried under a mountain of pebbles. The fact is that any huge de-

posits of pebbles are not visible there after the passage of three days of Ḥajj, except some scattered pebbles the cause of which is, as stated by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, that angels pick up these pebbles and the pebbles left there belong to people whose Ḥajj is not accepted for some reason. This is why it is forbidden to pick up pebbles lying near the Jamarāt and throw them on the pillars, as part of Ḥajj rites, since they are from the unaccepted ones.

In his comments on this phenomenon, Shaykh Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī has said in al-Khaṣā'is al-Kubrā that there are some miracles of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم which still live and stand, and shall continue right through to the Day of judgement and everyone shall see them. One of these, of course, is the unmatched presence of the Holy Qur'ān itself which cannot be matched even if the whole world joined its forces. This inability persists all the same as it was during the blessed days of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and shall continue to persist like that right through to the Day of Judgement. Every Muslim, no matter of what period of time, shall be able to challenge the whole world: فَاتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِثْلِهِ (Then, produce a Sūrah like it -10:38).

So is the miracle of Jamarāt as stated above. Similarly there is the statement of the Prophet عليه السلام in respect of Jamarāt. He has stated that pebbles thrown on these pillars are picked up by the angels in a manner invisible to mankind. The few pebbles left belong to those unfortunate people whose pilgrimage is not accepted by Allah. The Prophet's statement has stood the test of time for centuries in a row and it will continue upto the Great Day. This is one of the continuing miracles of the Prophet عليه السلام and a major sign of Allah in respect of the revered house of Ka'bah.

The Station of Ibrāhīm :

From among the signs associated with the Ka'bah there is the great sign - The 'Maqāmu Ibrāhīm' which has been mentioned separately in its own right. The Station of Ibrāhīm is the name of the stone on which Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام stood while building the edifice of Baytullah (the Ka'bah). There are narrations reporting that the stone raised itself along with the rising level of construction and came down automatically when so required. The footprints of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام are still there on this stone. Obviously, that an inert and

unconscious stone is invested with sudden intelligent volition to respond to functional needs and elevate itself, or come down, or that it is given the ability to assume the plasticity of wax and let a perfect print of feet appear on its surface, are all signs of the most perfect power of Allah reflecting the superior merit of Baytullah.

This stone used to be on the ground close to the door of the-Baytullah. When came the Qur'ānic command: **وَاتَّخِذُوا مِنْ مَّقَامِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ مُصَلًّى** (And make the station of Ibrāhīm a place of prayer - 2:125), this stone was removed from there, considering the convenience of those who made *tawāf*, and placed in front of the Baytullah, but at some distance outside the *maṭāf* (the area where *tawāf* is made) close to *Bi'r Zamzam* (the well of *Zamzam*, the original site of which is now marked with a black marble circle on the floor of the Baytullah with the legend inlaid in Arabic). Later, it was secured in a small structure behind which the two post-*tawāf raka'āt* were offered. The present position is that the station of Ibrāhīm has been placed securely in a strong metal-crystal casing, but it is the particular stone inside it which is the 'Maqāmu Ibrāhīm'. Offering the post-*tawāf ṣalāh* comprising two *raka'āt* behind or close to it is more merit-worthy. But the appellation, 'Maqāmu Ibrāhīm' taken in a literal sense, covers the entire al-Masjid al-Ḥarām, the Sacred Mosque. Therefore, Muslim jurists have ruled that offering the two *raka'āt* after *tawāf* anywhere within the Sacred Mosque would satisfy one's obligation.

'Whoever enters Baytullah is secure':

The second peculiarity of the Ka'bah mentioned in the verse is that 'whoever enters it is secure'. This statement has different aspects. Firstly, it is true in the legal sense, for Allah Almighty has ordained that one who enters there should not be molested or killed; even if a person kills someone or commits some other crime and goes into the sanctuary, he too should not be punished in there. Instead of that, he should be compelled to come out of the *Ḥaram* and when he does come out of the *Ḥaram*, the punishment due will then be given. This is how an entrant to *Ḥaram* gets the protection of Divine law.

The second form of security provided to the entrants of *Ḥaram* is factual. In the very design of Divine creation, Allah Almighty has caused awe and reverence for Baytullah to take roots in the hearts of

people. Even the Arab tribes of *Jāhiliyyah*, in spite of all their evil practices, were ready to sacrifice their lives to uphold the honour of Baytullāh. That they were all too wild and warring is well-known, yet they held the *Haram* in such esteem that a son whose father was killed would say nothing to the killer and quietly move away from him in spite of his burning rage for revenge.

The only time fighting was allowed within the *Haram* area was for a few hours through a revelation from Allah Almighty. The occasion was the conquest of Makkah and the permission was restricted to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in order that he could cleanse the Baytullāh and serve an important objective of faith. Soon after the conquest, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم made an express announcement to this effect and stressed that the original unlawfulness of fighting in the *Haram* continues to be valid for ever.

As far as the case of Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf is concerned who, after the time of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, took armed action against Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Zubayr رضى الله عنه in Makkah, resorting to killings and terror. Since his action was a grave sin and a flagrant violation of law and Ka'bah's sanctity, in the sight of the entire community which hated him for what he did, therefore, it does not affect the divine declaration of Ka'bah's sanctity. It is also difficult to say that he violated the built-in sanctity of Baytullah as such intentionally, for Hajjāj himself did not believe in the lawfulness of this action of his; he knew that he was committing a serious crime but he became overwhelmed by political and administrative considerations.

However, the truth is that the Muslim community at large has always held the *Haram* and Baytullāh in the highest possible esteem and has always regarded fighting or quarrelling in the sacred precincts as one of the most ugly sins. This is a unique mark of Baytullah, universally and exclusively.

The obligation of Hajj: A Distinction of Baytullāh

Allah Almighty has made the Hajj of Baytullāh an obligation subject to the condition that one has the necessary means and ability to reach there. Having 'means' can be explained by saying that one should have resources surplus to his basic needs which could help him take care of the cost of travel, to Baytullāh and back home, and the

expenses incurred during stay in the Holy Land. It is also necessary that his 'means' should be good enough to cover the expenses of his family until his return, for this is an standing obligation on him. Then, one should not be physically handicapped, being unable to see, or use hands and feet, for a handicapped person would not have the ability to go that far and complete the many requirements of the Hajj.

As women are not legally permitted to travel without a *Mahram* (marriage with whom is prohibited), they would be considered 'able' to embark on their Hajj if they are travelling with a *Mahram* making his Hajj whether the *Mahram* is bearing his own expenses or the woman pays for his expenses as well. Similarly, the route taken to reach the Hajj site should also be secure since this too is part of the condition of 'ability'. If peaceful conditions do not exist on the Hajj route and there is an acute danger to life and property, then, it would mean an absence of the 'ability' to perform Hajj.

Literally, Hajj means 'to intend'. What it means in terms of prescribed religious observance is already stated in the Holy Qur'ān itself, that is, the *tawāf* of the Ka'bah, the stay in 'Arafāt, and in Muzdalifah. Remaining details have been made clear by the Holy Prophet ﷺ through his words and deeds. So, after the announcement that the Hajj of Baytullah is an obligation, it was said:

وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ

And if one disbelieves, then Allah is independent of all the worlds.

Included here, undoubtedly, is the person who intentionally rejects the belief that Hajj is obligatory. It is obvious that such a person cannot be considered a Muslim. He is a disbeliever indeed, for the description: "And if one disbelieves" fits him clearly and comprehensively. Then, comes the case of one who does believe that Hajj is an obligation, yet he does not, inspite of having the means and the ability, perform it. He too, in a way, is no less a denier of the Divine command. In his case, the words: "and if one disbelieves" will apply in the form of admonition and warning since this person is acting like disbelievers who do not perform Hajj. In the process, such a person acts just like one of them.

This is why Muslim jurists, رحمهم الله, have said that this is a severe warning to those who do not perform Hajj inspite of having the means and the ability to do so and thus, by this heedless act of theirs, they become the likes of disbelievers. Let us seek refuge with Allah from such a fate.

Verses 98 - 101

قُلْ يَٰٓأَهْلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لِمَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ وَٱللَّهُ شَهِيدٌ عَلَىٰ
مَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٨﴾ قُلْ يَٰٓأَهْلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لِمَ تَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ
مَنۢ مِّنۡ أَمَنٍ تَبْغُونَهَا عِوَجًا وَأَنتُمْ شُهَدَآءُ ۚ وَمَا ٱللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ
عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا۟ إِن تَطِيعُوا۟ فَرِيقًا مِّنَ
ٱلَّذِينَ أُوْتُوا۟ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ يَرُدُّوكُمۢ بَعْدَ إِيمَٰنِكُمۡ كُفْرًا ۖ ﴿١٠٠﴾
وَكَيۡفَ تَكْفُرُونَ وَأَنتُمْ تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْكُمۡ آيَٰتُ ٱللَّهِ وَفِيكُمۡ
رَسُولُهُۥ ۖ وَمَن يَعْصِمْ بِٱللَّهِ فَقَدْ هُدِيَ إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ

﴿١٠١﴾

Say, "O people of the Book, why do you disbelieve the signs of Allah while Allah is witness to what you do?" [98]

Say, "O people of the Book, why do you prevent those who believe from the way of Allah seeking crookedness in it while you are witnesses (of the truth)? And Allah is not unaware of what you do." [99]

○ those who believe, if you obey a group from those who have been given the Book, (before you) they will turn you infidels after your having believed. [100] And how do you disbelieve while it is to you that the verses of Allah are recited, and present amidst you is His Messenger? And whoever holds on to Allah, he is surely guided to the straight path. [101]

Commentary

Several verses earlier, the text was dealing with the people of the Book, their false beliefs and their doubts. Then, appeared the mention

of Baytullāh and Ḥajj. Now once again, the people of the Book are the addressees. These verses relate to a particular event. There was a Jew, Shammās ibn Qays, who harboured a chronic malice against Muslims. Once, when he saw two Anṣār tribes, Aws and Khazraj, gathered together amiably at one place, his malevolence got the better of him and he went about looking for ways to sow seeds of discord between them. Finally, he set up a man suggesting to him that these two tribes have fought a much long-drawn war in pre-Islām days and both parties had recited poetical compositions highlighting their tribal pride. So why not recite these self-congratulating poetical compositions while both sit together. The moment these poems were recited there, emotions rose high, there were charges and counter-charges to the limit that the place and time of a fresh war was all set. When the Holy Prophet ﷺ heard about this, he came to them and said: 'What is all this? Here I am present amidst you and you are doing this after having become Muslims and after having become united and friendly with each other. This is sheer ignorance. Do you want, in this state of yours, to revert to *kufṛ*?'

They took the warning to their heart. They knew this was a slip caused by Satan. They embraced each other, wept and repented. These verses were revealed in the background of this event.

This event appears in Ruḥ al-Ma'ānī as narrated by Ibn Ishāq while there are others who narrate it from Zaid ibn Aslam. This subject continues through several verses after this. Here, the verses begin with an admonition to the people of the Book who had engineered this intrigue, and this admonition has been done with great eloquence when, before admonishing them for what they did, they were taken to task for their disbelief as well, which meant that it would have made better sense if they themselves had taken to the right path, and become Muslims, rather than devoting themselves to distract others to the wrong track. Following this, Muslims have been addressed, and served with a word of caution, specially when they have by their side, the Book and the Messenger of Allah, two powerful, never-failing sources, which would help them stay firm in their belief.

The expression وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ translated as 'And whoever holds on to Allah' means one who stays firm in, and totally committed to, his 'īmān

or faith, for 'i'tisām', the act of holding on to Allah firmly, denotes that one should affirm His Being and His Attributes, be staunchly faithful to what He has ordained, and in the process, be sure not to be lured into supporting the position of any adversary whoever that may be. One who acts in this manner 'is surely guided to the straight path'. It means that such a person is on the 'straight path', and being on the 'straight path' is the key to all that is good and beneficial which the Word of Allah promises to him.

Verses 102 - 103

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تَقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٠٢﴾ وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَى شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

O those who believe, fear Allah, a fear which is His due, and let not yourself die save as Muslims. [102]

And hold on to the cord of Allah, all of you, and be not divided. And remember the blessing of Allah upon you: When you were enemies to each other, and He brought your hearts together, then you, with His grace, became brothers. And you were at the brink of a pit of Fire, then, He saved you from it. This is how Allah makes His signs clear to you, so that you may take the right path.

[103]

Commentary

In the previous verses, Muslims were warned that the people of the Book, and others, want them to go astray from the right path so Muslims must remain vigilant of their moves and take steps to counter their anti-Muslim activities.

In the two verses appearing here, two important principles have

been given which go to make the collective strength of Muslims impregnable. These are:

1. *Taqwā*

2. Unity

The first principle appears in the first of the two verses. The second principle follows in the second verse. The first principle stated in the said verse is that one must 'fear Allah', that is, one should organize and manage his life with a full sense of responsibility before Allah, avoiding all that is forbidden or undesirable, doing so in a manner 'which is His due'.

What *Taqwā* is?

In Arabic, the word, '*Taqwā*' is used to denote avoidance and abstinence. It is translated as 'fear' in the sense that things one is asked to abstain from are nothing but things that cause fear, or alert one to the danger of Divine retribution.

Taqwā has its own degrees, the lowest is to avoid *Kufr* and *Shirk*, that is, disbelieving in Allah and His Message and attributing partners to His Divinity. In this sense, every Muslim can be counted as *Muttaqī* (one who has the quality of *Taqwā*), even if he is involved in sins. At several places in the Holy Qur'ān, the words, '*Muttaqīn*' (plural of *Muttaqī*) and '*Taqwā*' have been used in that sense as well. What is really desirable falls under the second degree of *Taqwā*, that is, to avoid that which is disliked by Allah and His Messenger. The merits and blessings of *Taqwā* enumerated in the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth have been promised on this degree of avoidance and abstinence.

As far as the third degree of *Taqwā* is concerned, this is a high station destined for prophets, عليهم السلام, their devoted deputies and men of Allah, for it is not within the grasp of everybody. To stand guard over one's heart against the onslaught of what does not relate to Allah, and to keep it filled with the remembrance of Allah and the desire to seek His pleasure, are great assignments.

The meaning of *Taqwā* 'as due'

While giving a directive to attain '*Taqwā*' the Holy Qur'ān has qualified the word of *Taqwā* with تَقِيَّةٌ (a fear which is His due) which means that one should seek to attain a degree of *Taqwā* which it inherently

deserves.

This has been explained by the blessed Companions, 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, Rabi', Qatādah and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī رضى الله عنهم in the following words:

حَقُّ تَقَاتِهِ هُوَ أَنْ يُطَاعَ فَلَا يُعْصَى وَيُذَكَّرُ فَلَا يُنْسَى وَيُشْكِرُ فَلَا يُكْفَرُ (المحيط)

'A fear which is His due' means that one obeys, then does not disobey; remembers then does not forget; and is grateful, then does not become ungrateful.' (Al-Baḥr Al-Muḥīṭ)

The above explanation has also been reported with its chain of authorities ascending to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم himself.

Major commentators have explained the sense of the above report differently. For instance, some say that the due fear of Allah means that, in obedience to Allah, one should dismiss all derogatory criticism, no matter where it comes from, always standing firm on what is just, even if, by being just, he has to hurt his own self, or his children, or his parents. Some say, that one can never hope to achieve 'Taqwā' as due' unless he protects his tongue.

There is another verse in the Holy Qur'ān where it is said:

اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ

Fear Allah as much as you can. (64:16)

According to the blessed Companions, Ibn 'Abbās and Ṭawūs, this is really nothing but an explanation of حَقُّ تَقَاتِهِ (a fear which is His due). It means that should one be doing his best, using all his attention and energy to guard against evil, the obligation of Taqwā shall stand fulfilled. If one, who has already done everything he could, happens to fall a victim to something impermissible, that would not be considered being against 'Taqwā as due'.

The statement which follows immediately: فَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ (and let not yourself die save as Muslims) tells us that Taqwā is, in reality, the whole of Islām since the total obedience to Allah and His Messenger, and the total avoidance of disobedience both to Allah and His Messenger is what Taqwā is all about; and this is what Islām is.

The command in the verse, 'and let not yourself die save as Muslims' raises a possible doubt as man does not control death, it may come anytime, anywhere. This doubt is removed when we consider the *ḥadīth*:

كَمَا تَحْيَوْنَ تَمُوتُونَ وَكَمَا تَمُوتُونَ تُحْشَرُونَ

'As you live, so shall you die; and as you die, so shall you be raised.'

Therefore, anyone who is determined to live his entire life by the tenets of Islām, and to the best of his determination and ability, acts accordingly, his death will definitely come, God willing, on a state of Islām. Now, about some *ḥadīth* narrations where it is said that there will be people who may have spent a life-time of good deeds, yet the entire roster of such deeds shall go waste because of something awful they did later. Such fate can befall those people only who did not act with sincerity and steadfastness from the very beginning. And Allah knows best.

UNITY: The second principle of collective Muslim strength:

In the second verse, 103: *وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا* (And hold on to the cord of Allah, all of you), the golden principle of unity has been presented with great eloquence and wisdom, for the principle, being the only effective binding factor, has been identified before the command to unite was given, following which, came the prohibition of disunity and chaos.

Elaborating this a little, it can be said that unity is something good and desirable, a premise generally approved by all human beings, no matter what place, time, religion or life style they adhere to. A person who considers fights and disputes as something useful, and good in themselves, would be hard to find anywhere. This is why all groups and parties around the world invariably ask people to unite, but experience shows that all is not well in world affairs. No doubt, everybody agrees that unity is useful, and necessary, yet humanity is divided apart in sects, groups and parties. Then, there is a whole chain of sects within sects and parties within parties, reaching the limits of absurdity where even the unity of two people, in the real sense, has become a myth. A few people get together, agree on something under the

driving force of temporary objectives; then, no sooner do interests get served, or remain unrealized, unity evaporates in thin air, and instead, there remains the fall-out of mutual bickering and hostility.

With a little deliberation, it will become clear that every group, every sect, almost every person would like to unite people on some self-made programme, while the position is that other people have their own self-made programmes. So, rather than agree with them, they invite others to line up under their programme. Therefore, all calls for unity end up in break-ups and chaos among parties and persons. Thus, stuck in this quagmire of differences, humanity at large is the loser.

Therefore, the Holy Qur'ān has not stopped at giving sermons on unity and order, instead, it has also come forward with a just principle which would help achieve and sustain the desired state of affairs in the world, something in which no group should find a ground for differences. The truth of the matter is that imposing a system or programme conceived by one or some members of the human race on other human beings, and hoping that all of them will accept it unanimously, is simply against commonsense, and justice, and is nothing but cheeky self-deception. However, the system and the programme given by the Creator-Sustainer of all the worlds, the *Rabb al-'Ālamīn*, is something all human beings should naturally agree upon. No rational human being can deny it on principle. Now, the only possible inroad to difference here can show up in the actual identification of the system given by the Sovereign of Sovereigns, the *Rabb*, the Lord. Which is it? The Jews say it is the system of the Torah, the Christians say it is the system of the Evangile; both say it was sent by God and it is necessary to act upon it. The approach goes as far as even the polytheists, who have groups among them attributing their respective religious rites to none but god.

But, if man could rise a little above his group prejudice and the blind following of forefathers, using his own God-given reason, he would stand face to face with the reality without any frills; the reality that the Last of the Prophets, صلى الله عليه وسلم, has come with the last message of Allah Almighty in the form of the Holy Qur'ān and that, at this point of time, there is no other system or living pattern acceptable

in the sight of Allah Almighty. Leaving this wider focus aside, we can turn to the first and present addressees of the Qur'ān, the Muslims who believe that in the world as we have found it, the Holy Qur'ān is the only way of life revealed by Allah Almighty without any shadow of doubt in it, and since Allah Almighty has Himself taken the responsibility of protecting it, there is just no possibility of interpolation or change in it right through to the Day of Judgement. With this position in view, I leave the part of the subject dealing with non-Muslim groups for some other occasion and say to Muslims alone who, being believers in the Qur'ān, have no other alternative line of action except this. If different parties among Muslims were to unite on the system of the Holy Qur'ān, thousands of their differences based on group, race and country would be resolved instantly, which block the road to human progress. Whatever difference may remain among Muslims, would possibly be in the understanding and the interpretation of the Qur'ān. If such difference stays within limits, it is neither blame-worthy nor harmful to collective human living. In fact, the existence of such difference of opinion among the learned is natural. Therefore, exercising restraint and observing limits should not be so difficult to manage. Contrary to this, if our parties, were to go on fighting in complete disregard to the Qur'ān then, they would not be left with any possibility of correction. It is this chronic dissension and disorder which the Holy Qur'ān has sternly forbidden, and it is because of this abandonment of a great Qur'ānic principle that our community at large is wasting its potential by succumbing to chaos and factionalism. The Holy Qur'ān, in the present verse, shows us the way as to how we can eliminate this tendency to become divided when it says:

وَاَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا

And hold on to the cord of Allah, all of you.

Here, *حبل الله* (the cord of Allah) means the Holy Qur'ān. The blessed Companion, 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd is the narrator of the *ḥadīth* in which the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been reported to have said:

كتاب الله هو حبل الله الممدود من السماء الى الارض

The Book of Allah is the cord of Allah, extended from the heavens to the earth.

In another narration of the *ḥadīth* by the noble Companion, Zayd ibn Arqam, the words are: حبل الله هو القرآن : The cord of Allah is the Qur'ān (Ibn Kathīr).

In Arabic usage, the word, '*ḥabl*' also means 'covenant' and, in an absolute sense, it covers everything that can be used as a connecting link. The metaphor of 'cord' has been used for the Qur'ān or the Faith to suggest that this is the connecting link which, on one side, establishes the lines of communion between those who believe and their Lord, while, on the other side, it brings all those who believe close together, forming one group.

In short, this one statement of the Qur'ān is full of wise rules of conduct. To begin with, it can be said that man must firmly act in accordance with the way of life revealed by Allah Almighty, that is, the Holy Qur'ān. Then comes the unity of action, that is, all Muslims should join hands to act in accordance with it. The result will be that Muslims will become united and organized as if they were a group holding on to the same cord firmly, turning the whole group into a powerful single body. The Holy Qur'ān has explained this mystique of Muslim unity more clearly in another verse where it was said:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ سَيَجْعَلُ لَهُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ وُدًّا

Surely, those who believe and do good deeds, among them the All-Merciful Allah shall create (mutual) affection. (19:96)

Also present here is a subtle analogy focused on Muslims holding fast to the Book of Allah. Their effort resembles the effort of those who would grip a strong rope while climbing and thus remain protected against a fall. So, the hint is: If Muslims keep holding on to the Book of Allah with their total strength, all in unison, no satan will ever succeed in dividing them. As a result, like their individual life, the collective strength of the Muslim community as well shall become stable and impregnable. Keeping a firm grip on the Qur'ān is something which helps in uniting scattered forces through which a dead nation gets new life. God forbid, if Muslims break away from it, it is certain that their national and collective life will be ruined, and when this happens, their individual life is not likely to fare any better.

Islam is the only source of the Muslim Unity

Unity and agreement need a centre of attraction or a common idea. This idea of a centre has been different with different peoples of the world. Somewhere it was race and tribal affinity. For instance, among the tribal complex of Arabia, Quraysh was one nation and Banū Tamīm another. There were other places where colour was the criterion, with black people taken as one nation, and the white people as another. There were still other places where the geographical or lingual factor was the centre of unity making Indian one nation and the Arab, another. Then there were areas where people rallied around ancestral customs drawing a line between those who follow these customs and those who do not, for instance, the Ārya Samājists in India.

The Holy Qur'ān, bypassing all these, made the Book of Allah basis of unity, that is, the system revealed by Allah Almighty. In a single stroke, it declared that Muslims are a nation attached to 'Hablillāh', the cord of Allah, and those who disbelieve are another nation, not attached to this strong 'cord' or 'rope'. The statement: **خَلَقَكُمْ فَمِنْكُمْ كَافِرٌ وَمِنْكُمْ مُؤْمِنٌ** (It is He who created you. So, some of you are infidels and some of you are believers) means just this. So, the unifying factors of geography, race, tribe or language do not deserve to be the centre of affinity for man generally has no control over them. One cannot have them by personal effort or choice. Black cannot become white, a Qurayshī cannot become a Tamīmī, an Indian cannot become an Arab. Such unities can exist in a very limited frame; they can never claim to have assembled the whole humanity under their umbrella hoping to have the entire world gathered on a united platform. This is why the Holy Qur'ān has made the Divinely revealed way of life as the centre of unity, something one can elect to have for himself. Everyone from the East or the West, black or white, speaking Arabic or English or any other language, coming from any family, any tribe, any human group, can freely make this centre of unity his own as the most rational and correct choice available. Then, humankind can come close together around this centre and become brothers and sisters to one another.

What is needed is a little impartial thinking, a slight rising above

custom, prejudice and habit, as a result of which, the seeker shall be striking the best bargain of his life. Hopefully, he will discover for himself the way of life revealed by Allah Almighty, understand it, and follow it holding fast on to this strong medium of communion with Allah. As a result of this, the whole humanity will become beneficially concentric, having the centre of God-given guidance in common. Consequently, every individual member of this great brotherhood will be able to tune his deeds, material and spiritual, to the jointly accepted way of life from Allah.

Here is the principle, wise and correct, of which Muslims can be proud, and confident when inviting others to join in. Unfortunately, conspiracies hatched by the Europeans, for centuries to crush the Muslim unity have succeeded in dividing the ranks of those who claim to be Muslims.

Now they have themselves accepted the differences of race, language and nationalities as the dividing forces, and the link of Muslim unity stands severed by the concept of Arabs and Non-Arabs, Indians and non-Indians etc. The Holy Qur'ān proclaims a universal reality, loudly and openly, time and again, that these distinctions are ill-founded and divisive and any unity based on them shall remain irrational and false. Acentericity is not the solution for Muslims who have no choice but to 'hold on to the cord of Allah', all of them, as a way of life. This has given them a place of honour earlier, and if there is yet another success destined for them, this is how it would come again.

Before we move on to the second part of the verse, let us remember the two distinct instructions given to Muslims in this verse, that is, they should first live by the system prescribed for them by Allah Almighty, then, they should hold fast to 'the cord of Allah' all together. This is how the Muslim *ummah* gained ascendance in the past and there is no reason why, it will not rise again.

This far the discussion revolved around the positive aspect of unity among Muslims. The text now takes up the negative aspect when it says: لَا تَفْتَرُوا (And be not divided). This is another example of the peculiarly wise style of the Holy Qur'ān when it would highlight the positive aspect first, then identify the negative, and forbid the later. In

another verse, it was said:

وَإِنَّ هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا السُّبُلَ فَتَفَرَّقَ بِكُمْ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ

Surely, this is the straight path, so, follow it. And do not follow (other) ways which will cause you to become separated from His way. (6:153)

Since disunity is the first and the last reason behind the destruction of a nation, therefore, the Holy Qur'an has repeatedly forbidden it in various ways. It has been said in another verse:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ فَرَّقُوا دِينَهُمْ وَكَانُوا شِيعًا أَنتَ مِنْهُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ

Those who have made divisions in their religion and become sects, you have nothing to do with them. (6:159)

Also narrated in the Holy Qur'an are events concerning communities led by their prophet's عليهم السلام, communities which fell into temporal and eternal disgrace because of their mutual disputes and disunity which turned them away from the honest pursuit of their central purpose of life.

The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said that there are three things Allah Almighty has liked for you while there are three others He has disliked. The ones He has liked are as follows:

1. That your worship should be for Allah alone and that you should not attribute partners to His divinity.
2. That you should hold on to the Book of Allah firmly and avoid disunity.
3. That you should have goodwill for those in authority from among you.

The three things which cause Allah's displeasure are:

1. Unnecessary argumentation.
2. Needless asking.
3. Wastage of resources.

(Ibn Kathīr from Abī Hurairah)

Differences and their Limits

A question that remains unanswered is: Is every difference to be

despised or is there a sort of difference which can be called unblameworthy? The answer is: Every difference is not blameworthy or despicable. A blameworthy difference is one in which individuals and groups stay away from the Qur'ān and think in terms of their whims and wishes. But, should it be that everyone stays united in and around the Qur'ān and at the same time, continues to accept the explanation and detail coming from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, and then, on the basis of God-given natural ability and intellectual quality, expresses differences in opinion about subsidiaries of religion, in which case, this difference will be natural and Islām does not forbid it. The difference among the blessed Companions and their Successors, and among leading juristic authorities was of this nature. It was nothing but this difference that was called a 'mercy' for the community. However, if these very subsidiary debates were to be invested with the status of the mainstream of religion, and differences arising out of them were to become a cause of controversy, confrontation, insult and vilification, then, this too will be considered blameworthy.

The Blessing of Brotherhood

The text, after making the two aspects of unity clear, points out to the conditions prevailing among pre-Islām Arabs. Because of tribal rivalries, incessant warfare and long-drawn blood feuds, the entire nation was on the brink of total ruin. What saved them from the fire of hatred was nothing but this blessings of Islām. So, it was said:

وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ
بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَى شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا

And remember the blessing of Allah upon you: When you were enemies to each other, and He brought your hearts together, then you, with His grace, became brothers. And you were at the brink of a pit of the Fire, then, He saved you from it. (103)

In other words, by erasing out deep-seated enmities going back to centuries, Allah Almighty made them brothers to each other through the benediction of Islām and the noble Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. This made their life worth living, materially and spiritually, establishing between them such exemplary friendship that even their enemies found it awesome. Where in the whole wide world would they have

found this brotherly unity, this enormous blessing of Allah, even if they were to spend the combined treasures of the world?

If we recollect what was said in the opening remarks under these verses, we can see very clearly that the present verse helps eliminate the mischief engineered by the wicked when they tried to disunite the tribes of Aws and Khazraj by reminding them of their past feuds. The lesson is: Once in Islām, division is unthinkable.

Unity among Muslims depends on obedience to Allah:

The above statement of the Holy Qur'ān unravels yet another mystery. We now know that, in reality, Allah Almighty is the Master of hearts. Activating mutual love and consideration in the hearts of a people is purely a Divine blessing. Obvious alongwith it is the fact that one can become deserving of the blessings of Allah only through obedience to Him. With disobedience and sin, one cannot hope to have this reward.

It also follows from here that for Muslims, if they desire to have a stable organization among them, and unity, the only alternative open is that they should make obedience to Allah their life style. This point has been hinted at towards the end of the verse where it was said:

كَذَلِكَ يبينُ اللهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

This is how Allah makes His signs clear to you, so that you may take the right path. (103)

Verses 104 - 105

وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٠٤﴾ وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا وَاخْتَلَفُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ وَأُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٠٥﴾

And there has to be a group of people from among you who call towards the good, and bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair. And it is these who are successful. [104] And do not be like those who became divided and fell into disputes after the clear signs had come to them. And for them there is grave punishment. [105]

Commentary

In the previous verses (102 - 103), Muslims were given two principles which guarantee their collective well-being. If everyone practiced *Taqwā*, and made Islām his linkage with Allah, the result will be that individual life will be corrected and the collective strength of Muslims will come in its wake.

In the present verses وَلَقَدْ كُنْزُكُمْ (104 - 105), yet another dimension of the proposed system has been added. It has been said here that Muslims are not to rest at the correction of what they think and do individually; but they should, alongwith that, be affectionately concerned with the good of other brothers and sisters in faith. By doing so, the whole community shall have the benefit of keeping its stance correct at all times, and at the same time, this will guarantee closer mutual cooperation and unity.

Collective well-being of Muslims depends on two things:

These are:

1. Self-correction through *Taqwā* and a firm hold on the 'cord of Allah' through the Qur'ān and the Faith.
2. The correction of others through call (*da'wah*) and positive propagation.

The second article of guidance appears in the opening verse which says: 'and there has to be a group of people from among you ...' So, the gist of the previous and the present verses is that one must correct his or her deeds and morals in the light of what Allah Almighty has sent as the Law, and with it, one must be concerned that other Muslim brothers and sisters do the same. The subject appears in Sūrah al-'Aṣr:

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ

Except those who believe and do good deeds and invite each other to truth and invite each other to patience. (103:2,3)

In order that Muslims have a firm bond of unity, they must relate to Allah, and in order that this bond stays firm through the ages, it is necessary that Muslims consider it their obligation to enjoin what is good in accordance with the dictates of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah on their brothers and sisters in faith, and to stop them from what is not

good. The purpose is that 'the cord of Allah' should not slip out of one's hands. This was succinctly illustrated by my well-known teacher, Shaykh al-Islām, Maulānā Shabbīr Aḥmad 'Uthmānī رحمه الله عليه who said:

"There is no way this 'cord of Allah' can break. That one loses his hand-hold on it is, of course, possible."

It is to offset this danger that the Holy Qur'ān asks Muslims to go on educating other brothers and sisters in faith exhorting them to good deeds and holding them back from the bad ones. This will become a collective effort to stay with Allah and His commands and collective will be their gains in this mortal world and in the Hereafter. There are other proofs in the Holy Qur'ān which show that the responsibility of mutual self-correction has been placed on the shoulders of each Muslim.

Cited above, you have seen the statement made in Sūrah al-'Aṣr. Elsewhere, in this very Sūrah 'Al-'Imrān, it is said:

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ

You are the best Ummah raised for mankind. You bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair. (3:110)

As is clear, here too, the obligation - 'to bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair' - has been assigned to the whole community. That they discharge this responsibility is the reason that they are placed higher over other communities. Similarly, there are a large number of sayings of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in this connection. As narrated in Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said:

والذى نفسى بيده لتأمرن بالمعروف ولتنهون عن المنكر اوليوشكن الله ان يبعث عليكم عقابا من عنده ثم لتدعنه فلا يستجيب لكم

By Him in whose hands is my life, you must bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair lest Allah inflicts upon you a severe punishment; you shall then pray to Him (for mercy) but your prayer shall not be answered.

In another *ḥadīth*, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said:

من رأى منكم منكرا فليغيره بيده، فان لم يستطع فبلسانه، وان لم يستطع

فبقلبه، وذلك اضعف الايمان

Whoever from among you sees that an evil is being committed then, he should change it with his hands. And if he is unable to do that, then, with his spoken word. And if he is unable to do even that, then, with his heart (i.e., abhor it taking it to be evil) and this is the weakest degree of faith.

All these citations leave no doubt about the fact that the duty of bidding the Fair and forbidding the Unfair falls on every individual of the community. The liability will, however, be proportionate to everyone's ability, which is true in the case of all other Islāmic injunctions. You may have noticed in the *ḥadīth* just quoted above that the obligation varies with ability.

Now, each function requires a different ability. First of all, the ability to bid the Fair depends on a correct knowledge of the Fair and the Unfair as such. One who cannot distinguish between the two or does not have a full knowledge of his undertaking would not be the right person to go out to others to bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair. Obviously, this would create disorder instead of discipline. It is quite possible that such a person may, because of his lack of knowledge, forbid something Fair or bid something Unfair. So, one who does not know the Fair and the Unfair is obligated to find it out, get to learn the *Ma'rūf* and *Munkar* as determined by the *Sharī'ah* of Islām and then he can go ahead and make these known to others as part of his community service. Let this be clear that until such time that one has acquired the pre-requisites of this mission, it is not permissible for him to stand up for this service. These days there are places where many ignorant enthusiasts would stand and deliver a sermon without knowing the Qur'ān or the Ḥadīth, or worse still, sections of common people would use hearsay to pick up arguments with others as to how something should or should not be done. This method is not proper to correct the Muslim society. Indeed it will result in more disputes and bring destruction to it.

Similarly, it is also included in 'to bid the Fair' that there be no formidable danger or unbearable harm likely to affect the person involved. Therefore, it was said in the *ḥadīth* quoted above that one should stop sin with his hands, that is, by this strength. If he is unable

to do so, let him do it with his tongue. If he is unable to do so with his tongue, he should at the least consider it bad in his heart. It is obvious that 'not being able to stop it with his tongue' does not just mean that this person's tongue cannot move. It simply means that he strongly apprehends that, should he open his mouth and speak the truth, his life will be taken or he will be subjected to some other serious injury or loss. In such a case, this person will not be taken as 'able' and he will not be called a sinner for the abandonment of bidding the Fair and forbidding the Unfair. It would be an entirely different matter, if he elects to stake his life and property in the way of Allah, bear all losses and still goes ahead and bids the Fair and forbids the Unfair, which is something many blessed Companions and their Successors have been reported to have done. This is determination at its highest, and a feat of great merit which raised their status in this world and in the Hereafter. But, what they did was not obligatory on them.

The nature of this obligation requires that one bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair in what is necessary; this would be obligatory. If done in what is commendable; the act too would remain commendable. For instance, the five *ṣalāts* are obligatory, therefore, giving good counsel to the non-performer of *ṣalāh* will become necessary on everyone. The *nawāfil* (optional prayers) are classed as commendable or desirable, therefore, giving good counsel on these will be commendable. Here, etiquette would require that while advising someone to do a commendable act, soft language and attitude must be adopted in all cases. Similarly, while inviting to an obligatory act, one should start with softness. However, he may resort to firmness in attitude if one rejects the soft call outright. It is common sight these days that people tend to object in case of what is commendable or indifferent rather strongly, but remain silent when people abandon what is obligatory.

In addition to this, this obligation will become operative for everybody when one actually sees something forbidden being done before his eyes. For instance, there is a person who is seeing that a Muslim is drinking wine, or stealing or raping, he will then be obligated with the duty to stop it to the best of his ability. If all this is not happening before his eyes, he is not liable to discharge this duty. Rather, this is the duty of the Islāmic government to inquire into the crime, investi-

gate and punish the criminal.

The words of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم (Whoever from among you sees that an evil is being committed) point out to this principle.

Then comes another level of this function - that there be a dedicated group among Muslims devoted exclusively to the mission of calling people to the Faith and giving them right guidance towards it. Its single mandate and activity should be that it keeps calling people to the Qur'ān and the Sunnah through word and deed. When it sees people less inclined towards what is good, or sees them indulging in evils, it should not fall short of pointing out what is good and preventing people from taking to the evil, of course, according to its ability. It should be realized that this great mission can be carried out fully and effectively only when the performers have a complete knowledge of questions involved, as well as, when they are conversant with methods that go to make the call effective in the light of Sunnah. It is for this reason that a particular group of Muslims has been charged with this responsibility as they are likely to take care of all ramifications of this effort.

So, in the present verse:

وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ

it has been said: And there has to be a group of people from among you who call towards the good and bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair.

The first part of the verse, "وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ" translated as (And there has to be a group of people from among you) gives a hint that the presence of this group is necessary. In case, a government does not shoulder this responsibility, it will become obligatory on Muslims that they should establish and operate such a group, because the vital role of the *Ummah* depends on the existence of such a group. What are the major features of this group? The Qur'ānic answer is: يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ (who call towards the good). It means that this call of theirs shall be their primary objective. What does 'khayr' or 'good' mean? The Holy Prophet ﷺ has himself explained it by saying: الخیر هو اتباع القرآن وسنتی that is, 'khayr' means following the Qur'ān and my Sunnah. (Ibn Kathīr)

Seen in a restricted sense, 'to bid the Fair and to forbid the Unfair' could have been taken to mean that doing so shall be needed only on special occasions when the evil or 'the Unfair' (*munkarāt*) are seen being committed. But, the expression *يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ* (who call towards the good) in the beginning makes it clear that the function of this group will be to call towards the good, even when evil practices are not seen, or time may not have come to perform something obligatory.

For example, it is known that in the period between sunrise and *Zawāl* (noon) no *ṣalāh* is prescribed by the Shari'ah. But this group shall continue even in this period, to exhort people to perform *ṣalāh* when it is due. Or, take fasting which may not be due at a particular time, the month of Ramaḍān being far away, but that group will not shelve its duty and become complacent. Instead, it will keep reminding people about the month of Ramaḍān in advance, stressing on them that fasting will be obligatory at that time. In short, calling people to good will be the intrinsic duty of this group for all times to come.

Then, this 'call towards good' has two sub-levels:

1. Calling non-Muslims towards '*khayr*', that is, Islām. This involves all Muslims. It means that every Muslim, in general, and this group, in particular, is responsible for giving the call of Islām, both by words and acts, to all peoples of the world. Therefore in a verse which enjoins *jihād* on Muslims, the true Muslims have been defined and praised in the following words:

الَّذِينَ إِنْ مَكَّنَّاهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَمَرُوا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَنَهَوْا عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ

that is, 'true Muslims are those who when We endow them with authority in a land the first thing they do is to establish a system of obedience to Allah on His earth, of which *ṣalāh* is an outward expression, and raise their financial system on principles governed by *zakāh*, and they make the bidding of the Fair and the forbidding of the Unfair their very purpose of life.' (22:41)

Only if, the Muslim community of today were to take to extending their call towards good to other peoples as their objective, all ills that have crept into our social frame through the blind following of non-

Muslim nations shall cease to exist. When a community resolves to unite for this great objective and becomes sure that it has to forge ahead among the nations of the world and that the responsibility of teaching and training them falls on its shoulders, will find that all its disunities have disappeared and there remains nothing but that wonderful goal in sight. The secret of the successes achieved by the Holy Prophet ﷺ and his noble Companions, رضى الله عنهم اجمعين, lies hidden behind this effort. It appears in a *hadīth* that the Holy Prophet ﷺ recited this verse رُكُنٌ مِّنْكُمْ (And there has to be a group of people from among you) and then said: This special group is the group of the noble Companions (Ibn Jarīr). This is because each individual from among these blessed souls considered himself personally charged with the responsibility of calling people to good.

2. The second sub-level of this noble function is to call Muslims themselves towards the good. This means that *tabligh* or the act of conveying the message of Allah should be done by all Muslims generally, and by the special group particularly, among Muslims, fulfilling the duty of *da'wah* imposed by the Qur'an.

Again this call takes two forms as given below:

a). The first form will be that of a general and open call to good through which all Muslims will be educated into necessary injunctions and morals which have to be followed in Islām.

b). The second call would be particular and selective through which the objective will be to produce experts in the Muslim community, experts in the sciences of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Another verse of the Holy Qur'an leads in this direction:

فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِن كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِّنْهُمْ طَائِفَةٌ لِّيَتَفَقَّهُوا فِي الدِّينِ وَلِيُنذِرُوا قَوْمَهُمْ إِذَا رَجَعُوا إِلَيْهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَحْذَرُونَ

So, why should it not be that a group from every section of them goes forth, so that they may acquire perfect understanding of the Faith, and so that they may warn their people when they return to them, that they may be cautious. (9:122)

Further on, this responsibility-bearing group has been identified as carrying the additional distinction of *يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ*, that is, 'they bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair'.

The word, '*ma'rūf*' literally means 'recognized' but as a Qur'ānic term it includes all good enjoined by Islām, and promoted by all prophets during their respective ages. Since what is good is known and recognized, it has been referred to as '*ma'rūf*'.

Similarly, the word, '*munkar*' literally means 'non-recognized' or 'alien', but as a Qur'ānic term it includes all evils and disorders about which it is well-known and recognized that the Holy Prophet ﷺ declared them to be impermissible.

Keeping this in view, another point is worth-consideration. The Holy Qur'ān could have used the word '*wājib*' (what is obligating) instead of '*ma'rūf*', and the word '*ma'āsī*' (sins) instead of '*munkar*', but it did not do so. The selection of the words '*ma'rūf*' and '*munkar*' may be indicative of the principle that the subject of bidding the Fair and forbidding the Unfair must be an act which is recognized by the entire Muslim *Ummah* as 'fair' or 'unfair' without any difference of interpretation. As for the rules deduced through *ijtihād*, which have always been open for the different interpretations offered by the capable Muslim jurists, they should not be made an issue during the process of *al-amr bi'l-ma'rūf wa'l-nahy 'an al-munkar*: 'bidding the fair and forbidding the unfair'¹ It is a pity that such a wise Qur'ānic principle is being generally neglected in the Muslim community, and the Muslims are made to fight each other on the secondary issues which can admit different interpretations. People tend to consider such efforts as some feat of piety while the evils which are held by the entire *umma* unanimously as sins and are being committed in the community receive much less attention and often go unchecked.

Towards the conclusion of the verse, the commendable end of the group described therein has been enshrined in the following words:

وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

And it is these who are successful.

It simply means that, in reality, success is achieved by such people alone.

1. It means that if a recognized school of Islamic jurisprudence, such as Hanafi school adopting a particular interpretation of Islamic law, has held an act as 'fair', the holders of an opposite view like Shāfi'ites should not blame or reproach the former for their action, and vice versa. (editor)

Primarily, this description applies to the great group of the Companions of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. They were the ones who rose with the great objective of calling towards the good and of curbing what is bad and in a very brief period of time conquered the entire world of their time. There were power centres of Byzantine and Persia which could not stop them and they went ahead teaching lessons in morality and purity and ushering around the light of righteousness and Godliness wherever they went.

Having established that Muslims have a distinct mission to convey and preach the God-oriented message of good, the text moves on to warn Muslims with the words:

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا وَاخْتَلَفُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ

And do not be like those who became divided and fell into disputes after clear signs had come to them. (105)

It means that Muslims should not be like Jews and Christians who, even after clear injunctions of Allah Almighty had reached them, became divided in the implementation of the basic code of faith simply because they preferred to follow the dictates of their desires. Thus, thrown in violent mutual disputations, vocal and physical, they brought Divine punishment upon themselves. This verse is, in fact, a complement of *وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا* (verse 103) where Muslims were asked to seek unity and strength by attaching themselves to Allah's commands, individually and collectively, which helps make an entire community act like one body, one person, one entity. Then comes the perpetual mission of *da'wah*, the act of calling people to good, the process of bidding the Fair and forbidding the Unfair. These nurture and strengthen that unity. After that, by saying *وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا* (and be not divided) in verse 103 and *وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا* (And do not be like those who became divided) in the present verse, Muslims have been asked to learn a lesson from past communities which were destroyed by mutual dissensions with the good counsel that they should do their best to stay safe against this disease.

The type of divisiveness censured in this verse is a division that shows up because of arrogant and egotistic self-assertiveness, be it in the fundamentals of religion or in its subsidiaries. The statement

after clear signs had come to them' is an obvious indicator towards this explanation. The truth is that all fundamentals of religion are clear. Even some subsidiaries are so clear that they allow no margin of disagreement, unless of course, there be a selfish motive behind it.

However, there are subsidiary issues not so definite and clear. They may have no clear support from the texts of the Holy Qur'ān and Sunnah, (rather they are deduced by the scholars on the basis of analogy) or the text on which they are based is open to different interpretations. The resulting difference of opinion in the understanding of these subsidiaries is not included in the sense of this verse. The well-known authentic *ḥadīth* narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim from the blessed Companion, 'Amr ibn al'Āṣ, is more than enough to permit it. In this *ḥadīth* the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said that one who does *Ijtihād* (conducting a competent inquiry within the framework provided by the Sharī'ah to resolve a religious issue) and comes up with a ruling which is correct, he gets a twofold reward; and if he makes a mistake in his *Ijtihād*, he gets one reward.

This tells us that an *Ijtihād* made by a competent scholar even if it turns out to be erroneous, is still worthy enough for a reward provided utmost effort has been made. How can this be regarded as blame-worthy? So, the difference of opinion resulting from *Ijtihād* undertaken by the blessed Companions and the great Imāms has absolutely no connection with the present verse. According to Sayyidnā Qāsim ibn Muḥammad and 'Umar ibn 'Abdul-'Azīz رحمه الله عليه, the difference of opinion among the noble Companions is a source of mercy and ease for people (as in *Ruḥ al-Ma'ānī* from al-Baihaqī and al-Mudkhal).

Ruling on difference of opinion

Let us have a clear understanding of a serious matter of principle which arises out of this discussion. When we talk about differences in *Ijtihād*, we mean an *Ijtihād* which is permissible under the *Sharī'ah* of Islām. (There is no such thing as an *Ijtihād* outside the ramifications of the *Sharī'ah*). In a *Sharī'ah*-based *Ijtihād*, one or the other *Imām* may elect a view to stand by according to his line of thought, but the fact shall remain that, in the sight of Allah, only one of these views is true while other views are not so true. But again, the decision as to which is true and which is not rests with Allah Almighty, who will

bestow, on the Day of Resurrection, a twofold reward on the *Imām* and *'Alīm* who arrives at the correct ruling through his *Ijtihād*. Also rewarded on this Day, will be the one whose *Ijtihād* was not correct. In short, nobody except Allah has the right to sit on judgement in the difference of interpretation and say that this is true and that is false. However, to the best of one's understanding and insight whichever side one thinks is closest to the Qur'ān and the Sunnah he may say that, as far as he thinks, his choice is correct, although the possibility of its being incorrect cannot be ruled out and that which is the opinion on the other side, different from his chosen option is regarded as incorrect, with the possibility of that it may be correct in the sight of Allah. This is something all leading Imāms of *Fiqh*, the masters of Muslim jurisprudence, agree upon.

So, the rule becomes clear that no side taken in a difference of interpretations is '*munkar*' or 'unfair' and open to objection. Thus it will not be subjected to reproach under the authority of *بِأَمْرٍ مِّنَ الْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَى عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ* (Bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair). More so, when it is not unfair, raising an objection against what does not fall under the 'Unfair' would itself be regarded as unfair. This must be avoided. This is a rule most educated people do not fully comprehend these days or simply neglect it. They do not desist from abusing and verbally attacking others who think otherwise with all sorts of derogatory remarks and fretting. Inevitably, this leads to internecine confrontation and rampant disunity among Muslims, a phenomenon visible all over the Muslim world.

It has been already said that a difference of interpretation, if it corresponds to the principles of *Ijtihād*, does not go against the injunction *وَلَا تَفْرَقُوا* (and be not divided) and, therefore, it is not blameworthy. But, the way this difference is being handled these days, when quarrelsome debates around the tertiary subjects are being nursed as if they were the very basis of Muslim faith. Unfortunately this is what results in mutual confrontation and abuse. It can be said without any shade of doubt that this behaviour is certainly an open violation of the same Qur'ānic injunction *وَلَا تَفْرَقُوا* (and be not divided). It is, most certainly, objectionable and totally contrary to the way of our learned elders, the blessed Companions and their Successors. There is no

precedent for this type of behaviour among the early scholars (the Companions and their disciples) who were the best of our community. That anyone was ever blamed on the basis of difference of opinion in matters of interpretation in this manner is something unheard of. For instance, Imām Shāfi'ī and other Imāms, may Allah have mercy on them all, rule that in a *ṣalāh* offered in a congregation behind an imām, all those offering their prayer behind him must recite the Sūrah al-Fātiḥah as an obligation. Given this ruling anyone who does not fulfil this obligation will not have offered his *ṣalāh* at all. Parallel to this is the view of Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, may Allah have His mercy on him, according to whom it is not permissible for one who prays behind an imām to recite his own Sūrah al-Fātiḥah, therefore, the Ḥanafiyah do not recite it while offering prayers in a congregation behind an imām. But, nowhere during the entire history of Muslim community there is any report saying that the followers of the Shāfi'ī school considered Ḥanafiyah as the deserters of the obligation of *ṣalāh* or that their prayers are not complete. They have never been blamed or criticised in the manner one would criticise and attack the evil acts forbidden by the Shari'ah.

Imām ibn 'Abd al-Barr has, mentioned the attitude of the early scholars and the revered elders in the following words:

عن يحيى بن سعيد قال ما برح اهل الفتوى يفتون فيحل هذا ويحرم هذا
فلا يرى المحرم ان المحل هلك لتحليله ولا يرى المحل ان المحرم هلك
لتحريمه (جامع بيان العلم، ص ٨٠)

Those who are entitled to give *fatwā*, have always been issuing *fatwās*. One of them would rule (concerning injunctions not covered under the texts) that something is lawful while the other will rule it to be unlawful. But, the latter takes the former doomed to perdition, nor does the former think that the later is doomed to perdition. (Jami' Bayān al-'Ilm, p. 80)

An important note of caution

All this discussion about *Ijtihād* relates to the one carried out under the standard rules governing it. The very first condition is that *Ijtihād* can be resorted to in questions and issues about which there is no categorical decision available in the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. Or, it

may be that such decision is not clear and susceptible to more than one interpretation. Or, it is possible that a combination of some verses of the Qur'ān and some narrations of the *ḥadīth* may be apparently contradictory. In situations such as this, only those who possess the necessary pre-requisites to carry out *Ijtihād* will be entitled to do so. *Ijtihād* is no easy matter. It requires the most perfect expertise (in the real and full sense of the term) of all disciplines related to the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth, a comprehensive and perfect knowledge of the Arabic language, and a comprehensive knowledge of the sayings of the blessed Companions and their Successors. Therefore, anyone who dabbles in questions which have been settled by authoritative texts and comes up with opinions contrary to those of leading authorities, then this difference of opinion will not fall under the category of *Ijtihād* as envisaged by the Sharī'ah..

This will also be true about the person who does not fulfil the conditions of *Ijtihād*. What he says does not affect the question at all. This tendency has unfortunately become fairly visible in Muslim societies. Those who consider themselves educated (in modern sciences) have started to express their personal opinions relating to matters that have been settled in the Qur'ān and Sunnah. This is ignorance at its ugliest. These are issues where even Imāms and *mujtahids* would not dare speak. How can the exercise of so called *Ijtihād* be acceptable from a person who does not even possess the knowledge of Islāmic sciences let alone the highest level of learning required for *Ijtihād*.

Verses 106 - 109

يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ اسْوَدَّتْ
وُجُوهُهُمْ ^ف أَكْفَرْتُمْ بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ فَذُوقُوا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ
تَكْفُرُونَ ﴿١٠٦﴾ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ ابْيَضَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ فَفِي رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ
هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿١٠٧﴾ تِلْكَ آيَاتُ اللَّهِ نَتْلُوهَا عَلَيْكَ بِالْحَقِّ
وَمَا اللَّهُ يُرِيدُ ظُلْمًا لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٠٨﴾ وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمُوتِ
وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ۖ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ ﴿١٠٩﴾

On a day when faces shall turn bright and faces shall

turn dark, as for those whose faces turn dark, (they shall be questioned): "Did you disbelieve after you had accepted the Faith? Now taste the punishment because you have been disbelieving." [106]

And as for those whose faces turn bright, they rest in Allah's mercy. They are there for ever. [107]

These are the verses of Allah We recite to you with all veracity. And Allah wants no injustice for (anyone in) the worlds. [108]

And to Allah belongs what is in the heavens and what is in the earth. And to Allah all matters are returned. [109]

Commentary

The meaning of 'bright' and 'dark' faces:

This expression appears in the Holy Qur'an at several places, for instance:

وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ تَرَى الَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ وُجُوهُهُم مُّسْوَدَّةٌ

On the day of Doom, you shall see those who lied against Allah (with) their faces blackened. (39:60)

وُجُوهُهُم مُّسْوَدَّةٌ مُّسْفِرَةٌ صَاحِكَةٌ مُّسْتَبْشِرَةٌ وَوُجُوهُهُم مُّزْجَرَةٌ غَيْرُهَا تَرْهَقُهَا قَتَرَةٌ

Some faces on that day shall shine, laughing, joyous. Some faces on that day shall be dusty, overspread with darkness. (80:38)

وُجُوهُهُم مُّزْجَرَةٌ نَّاظِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ

Faces on that day shall be radiant, looking towards their Lord. (75:22)

In these verses, several words such as, '*bayād*', '*sawād*', '*ghabarah*', '*qatarah*', and '*naḍirah*', have been used to carry the same sense. In the English translation, where applicable, they appear in italics. According to the majority of commentators, 'brightness' signifies the brightness of the light of Faith, that is, the faces of believers shall be resplendent with the light of Faith, fresh and smiling due to happiness (as a result of rewards bestowed upon them by Allah). 'Darkness' signifies the darkness of disbelief, that is, the faces of the

disbelievers will be covered with the gloomy anguish of disbelief and the added soot of sin and transgression would turn them still darker.

Who are these people?

Commentators have explained the identity of the people with 'bright and 'dark' faces variously. Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضى الله عنه says that the faces of the followers of Sunnah shall be 'bright' and those of the followers of *Bid'ah* (innovation in the revealed Faith, not intended by Allah and His Messenger, nor by his learned dark Companions). Ḥaḍrat 'Aṭa' رحمه الله عليه says that the faces of the *Muhājirīn* and *Anṣār* shall be 'bright' and the faces of the Banī Qurayzah and Banī Naḍīr shall be 'dark' (Qurtubī).

Imām Tirmidhī narrates a *ḥadīth* from Sayyidnā Abū Umāmah رضى الله عنه which identifies these as relating to the Khawārij, the oldest sect of rebels), that is, the 'dark' faces shall belong to the Khawārij, and the 'bright' faces to those whom they shall kill. The *ḥadīth* is given below:

قال ابو امامة كلاب النار شرقتلى تحت اديم السماء ، وخير قتلى من قتلوه
ثم قرأ : "يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌ"

When Sayyidnā Abū Umāmah was asked if he had heard the *ḥadīth* from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, he replied, while counting on his fingers, that he would not have narrated this *ḥadīth* had he not heard it from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم seven times (Tirmidhī).

Sayyidnā 'Ikrimah رحمه الله عليه says that 'dark' faces shall belong to those from among the people of the Book who did confirm the coming of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم before he was ordained. But when he had been given prophethood they did not accept and support him. On the contrary, they started falsifying him (Qurtubī).

There are other explanations as well, other than those cited above, but they all lead to the same conclusion, and are not contradictory. Imām al-Qurtubī has said in his *Tafsīr* that the expression يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌ in the verse means that the faces of sincere Muslims shall be 'bright' but the faces of all those who may have altered their religion, or may have become apostates and disbelievers, or may be concealing their hypocrisy in their hearts, shall be 'dark'.

Some special notes:

In the verse Allah Almighty has mentioned the *bayād* first, and the *sawād* or darkness after it. But, in the verse which follows: **فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ اسْوَدَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ** (As for those whose faces turn dark), *sawād* or darkness has been made to appear before *bayād* or brightness, although the sequence of the original statement required that the mention of brightness appear first at this place as well. This reversal of the order seems to indicate that Allah Almighty has pointed out to His main purpose of creation. That purpose is to bless His creation with His mercy; punishment is not the objective. So, those with bright faces come first as they deserve the mercy and merit from their Lord. People with dark, anguished faces were mentioned later as the ones who deserve punishment. Towards the close of the verse, the statement **فَنِي رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ** (They rest in Allah's mercy) is meant to stress upon the great mercy of the Creator. One cannot miss observing that those deserving of mercy were identified immediately at the beginning of the verse and again, at the end of the verse, and very affectionately indeed. The mention of those whose faces shall turn dark remains in between. All this points out to His limitless, endless mercy, clearly suggesting that human beings were certainly not created to serve as an exhibit or manifestation of Divine punishment; instead, they were created to flourish under the sunshine of Allah's mercy.

2. About the statement, 'they shall rest in Allah's mercy', the blessed Companion Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضى الله عنه says that '*rahmah*' or 'mercy' in the verse means '*Jannah*' or 'paradise'. Here too, the wisdom behind giving the name 'mercy' to 'paradise' is, quite obviously, that man, no matter how worshipful and pious he may be, shall not enter Paradise unless it be through the sole mercy of Allah Almighty. The reason is that being devoted in acts of worship is no feat of human excellence as such. On the contrary, the very ability to do so is, in itself, a gift of Allah. So, '*ibadah*' or worship does not, in itself, create an inherent right to enter Paradise. It is Allah's mercy alone through which one can enjoy the bliss of Paradise. (al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr)

3. The sentence **فَنِي رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ** (they rest in Allah's mercy) is immediately qualified by **فَهُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ** (they are there for ever). This means that the mercy in which the believers shall rest will not be temporary; it

would be forever and eternal. This blessing will never be taken away or reduced in their case. In contrast to this are those whose faces shall turn dark; for them, it has not be expressly mentioned if they shall be in that state for ever.

Sinning man earns his own punishment:

The verse (106) **فَذُوقُوا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ** (now taste the punishment because you have been sinning) indicates that the punishment on that Day is not from Allah but that it is as consequence of what man has earned while living his mortal life, for the truth is that the blessings of paradise and the hardships of hell are simply a changed form of our very deeds. So, later on in verse 108, it was said: **وَمَا اللَّهُ بِرَبِّدُ ظُلُمَاتٍ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ** (and Allah wants no injustice for {anyone in the worlds} which means that Allah has no intention of being unjust to His creation. Whatever reward or punishment there is, is nothing but justice and very much the perfect expression of the divine wisdom and mercy.

Verse 110

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَوْ آمَنَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ مِّنْهُمْ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿١١٠﴾

You are the best *Ummah* raised for mankind. You bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair and believe in Allah. And if the people of the Book had believed, it would have been better for them. Of them, there are the believers, while most of them are the sinners. [110]

Sequence

In previous verses, Muslims were asked to take special care in order to remain steadfast in their faith, bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair. In the present verse, it has been further emphasised that these are the very reasons why Allah Almighty has conferred upon the *Ummah* of Muḥammad, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, the status of '*Khayr al-Umam*', the best of communities, dignified and elevated, when it does what it has been charged to do.

Why the best of communities?

The Holy Qur'ān has, in different verses, given several reason for

declaring the *Ummah* of the Holy Prophet Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم as the best *Ummah*, the most important of which has appeared in Surah al-Baqarah, that is:

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا

And in the same way We made you a moderate *Ummah* (community). (2:143)

A detailed explanation of this verse can be seen in Volume I of this commentary. This portion deals with the major reason why the *Ummah* of Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم has been called the best of human communities. There it has been pointed out that moderation is its great characteristic and that it is visible in all department of its collective life.

In this particular verse, another reason has been given. The reason is that this community has been raised for the sole purpose of dispensing good to all beings created by Allah. It has been actually charged with the function of remaining concerned with their spiritual and moral reformation. Seen in the perspective of past communities, it was this community which contributed most in the mission of 'bidding the Fair and forbidding the Unfair', even though this was already enjoined upon past communities as mentioned in authentic *aḥādīth*. However, to begin with, several past communities did not have *Jihād* as a religious obligation, in which case, the mission of 'bidding the Fair' could only be carried out by heart and tongue only. Available with the followers of Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم is a third option of 'bidding the Fair', that of the power of the hand, which also includes all sorts of *Jihād*. Then, the enforcement of Islāmic laws through the agency of the government is also a part of it. In the case of other communities, distinguishing features of religion were gradually obliterated by general inertia. The obligation of *amr bi l'ma'rūf*, the ordained mission of bidding the Fair, also stood totally forsaken. As far as this *Ummah* of his is concerned, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ made this prophecy:

In this *Ummah*, there shall be right through the day of Doom, a group of people which will remain firm and stick to (the task of) bidding the Fair and forbidding the Unfair.

The second distinguishing feature of this community is that they 'believe in Allah': **مُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ**. At this point one may ask why should this be a distinguishing feature of the Muslim community as belief in Allah has been the common factor between all past prophets and their communities. The answer is clear. No doubt, belief as such is common to all, but the degrees of perfection in belief differ. The degree of preference given to the community of Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم has a class of its own as compared to past communities.

Towards the end of the verse, it has been said about the people of the Book that there are some Muslims among them. This refers to those who had confirmed the prophethood of our Holy Prophet ﷺ such as, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Salām and others.

Verse 111

لَنْ يَضُرَّوْكُمْ إِلَّا أَذًى وَإِنْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ يُؤْلَوْكُمْ الْأَدْبَارُ ثُمَّ لَا
يُنصَرُونَ ﴿١١١﴾

They shall never (be able to) cause you any harm except a little hurt. And if they fight you, they will turn their backs on you, then they shall not be helped. [111]

Commentary

In previous verses (98-101), it was shown how hostile to Muslims the people of the Book were and how they planned to bring religious harm to them. Mentioned in the present verse are their plans to harm Muslims materially. The last sentence carries the prophecy that they shall not succeed.

This prophecy of the Holy Qur'an was proved true when, during the entire period of prophethood, the people of the Book were unable to overcome the noble Companions who are the primary addressees here. This applies particularly to the Jewish tribes who had tried to sow seeds of discord among the Companions. The outcome was that these people were disgraced; some paid *jizya*, some were killed while others were exiled.

The next verse (112) makes the description complete.

Verse 112

ضَرَبْتُ عَلَيْهِمُ الدَّلَّةَ أَيْنَ مَا تُقِفُوا إِلَّا يَحْبِلُ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَحَبْلٌ مِنَ
النَّاسِ وَبَاءٌ وَ يُعْصَبُ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَضَرَبْتُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمُسْكَنَةَ
ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَيَقْتُلُونَ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ بِغَيْرِ
حَقٍّ ذَلِكَ بِمَا عَصَوْا وَ كَانُوا يَعْتَدُونَ ﴿١١٢﴾

Disgrace has been stamped over them wherever they are found, unless (saved) through a source from Allah and through a source from men, and they have returned with wrath from Allah, and misery has been stamped over them. All this because they used to deny the signs of Allah and to slay the prophets unjustly. All this because they disobeyed and used to cross the limits. [112]

Commentary

The meaning of disgrace and wrath cast on the Jews:

A detailed discussion on this subject has already appeared under comments on verse 61 of Sūrah al-Baqarah where the text has not mentioned any exception. This can be seen in Volume I of this commentary. It also covers the exception given in the present verse -
إِلَّا يَحْبِلُ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَحَبْلٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ .

Briefly, the verse means that the Jews shall remain stamped with disgrace and misery except under two situations:

1. Though a Covenant of Allah. For example, a minor child or woman shall not be killed. (This exception is meant by the words 'through a source from Allah').

2. Through a treaty obligation, that is, بِحَبْلِ مِنَ النَّاسِ (through a source from men). Such patronage may cause their disgrace and misery not to become manifest. The specific words used in the Holy Qur'ān i.e., a source from men, cover all men, believers and disbelievers. The possibility that they live with freedom after making a peace treaty with Muslims is included here. Also possible is the situation that they may come under the protection of other non-Muslim powers through a peace treaty (or informal collaboration strategy), a situation that prevails in the form of the present-day state of Israel. To discerning

people all over the world, it is no secret that the state of Israel is really a joint encampment of the West. Behind all the facade of power they appear to have is the power of others. If the U.S., U.K., Europe, and USSR too, were daring enough to withdraw their patronage of Israel, it would not survive for a day. Allah knows best.

Verses 113 - 117

لَيْسُوا سَوَاءً مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ أُمَّةٌ قَائِمَةٌ يَتْلُونَ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ
 أَنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ وَهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ ﴿١١٣﴾ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ
 يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُسَارِعُونَ فِي
 الْخَيْرَاتِ وَأُولَئِكَ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿١١٤﴾ وَمَا يَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ
 فَلَنْ يُكْفَرُوهُ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١١٥﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَنْ
 تُغْنِيَ عَنْهُمْ أَمْوَالُهُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَأُولَئِكَ
 أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿١١٦﴾ مَثَلُ مَا يُنْفِقُونَ فِي
 هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا كَمَثَلِ رِيحٍ فِيهَا صِرٌّ أَصَابَتْ حَرْثَ قَوْمٍ
 ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ فَأَهْلَكَتُهُ وَمَا ظَلَمَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَلَكِنْ أَنْفُسُهُمْ
 يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿١١٧﴾

Not all of them are alike: Among the people of the Book there are those who are steadfast; they recite the verses of Allah in the night hours and they prostrate; [113] they believe in Allah and the Hereafter, and bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair, and race towards the good deeds. They are among the righteous. [114] And whatever good they do, they shall never be deprived of it. And Allah is All-Aware of the God-fearing. [115]

Surely, those who disbelieve, neither their wealth nor their children shall help them against Allah; and they are the people of the Fire. They shall be there for ever.

[116]

The example of what they spend in this worldly life is just like a wind which, having chill within, hit the tillage of those who wronged themselves, and

destroyed it. And Allah has not wronged them, instead, they wrong themselves. [117]

In verse 110, it was said that among the people of the Book there are those who believe, yet most of them are disbelievers. Details appear in the present verse which gives a complementary profile of those who believed from among the people of the Book, and by becoming Muslims, they adopted the distinguishing hallmarks of the Faith that go to make believers the best of communities.

Soon after praising those who had embraced Islām from among the people of the Book, the text censures those of them who did not embrace Islām and insisted on retaining their stance of disbelief, not realizing that their wealth and their children will be unable to save them from the punishment of Allah and Hell shall be their eternal abode.

Verse 117 declares through a similitude that disbelievers simply waste what they spend in this worldly life, for belief in Islām is a precondition in order that such spendings be acceptable with Allah, of whatever sort they may be. The similitude stresses the fact that disbelievers inflict this injustice upon themselves when their spendings go to waste in this world and remain rewardless in the Hereafter. If they were not to wrong themselves, if they were to embrace Islām, they would have been like other Muslims who, on suffering a worldly loss, are compensated by Allah through reward and forgiveness of sins, as reported in a *ḥadīth*.

Verse 118 - 120

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا بَطَانَةً مِّنْ دُونِكُمْ لَا يَأْلُونَكُمْ
خَبَالًا ۖ وَذُؤُوا مَا عَيْتُمْ ۚ قَدْ بَدَتِ الْبَغْضَاءُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ ۚ وَمَا
تُخْفَىٰ صُدُورُهُمْ أَكْبَرُ ۚ قَدْ بَيَّنَّا لَكُمُ الْآيَاتِ إِن كُنْتُمْ تُعْقِلُونَ
﴿١١٨﴾ هَآئِنْتُمْ أُولَآءِ يُحِبُّونَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِبُّونَكُمْ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْكِتَابِ
كُلِّهِ ۚ وَإِذَا لَقُّوَكُمْ قَالُوا آمَنَّا ۚ وَإِذَا خَلَوْا عَصَوْا عَٰلَيْكُمْ
الْأَنَامِلَ مِنَ الْغَيْظِ ۚ قُلْ مُؤْمِنُوا بِعَٰظِمِكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ

الْصُّدُورِ ﴿١١٩﴾ إِنَّ مَسَسَكُمُ حَسَنَةٌ تَسُوءُهُمْ وَإِنْ تُصِيبَكُمْ
سَيِّئَةٌ يَفْرَحُوا بِهَا وَإِنْ تَصِيرُوا تَتَّقُوا لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ كَيْدُهُمْ
شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطٌ ﴿١٢٠﴾

O those who believe, do not take anyone as insider but from your own selves. They would spare no effort to do you mischief. They want you to be in trouble. Malice has come out of their mouths while what is concealed in their hearts is far worse. We have made the signs clear to you, provided that you understand. [118]

Look, you are the ones who love them and they do not love you. And you believe in the Book, in all of it. And when they meet you, they say, "We believe", and when they are alone they bite their finger-tips out of rage against you. Say, "Die in your rage." Surely, Allah is All-Aware of what lies in the hearts. [119]

If something good happens to you, it annoys them and if something evil befalls you, they are delighted with it. And if you keep patience and fear Allah, their cunning shall not harm you at all. And Allah is All-Encompassing of what they do. [120]

Commentary

These verses were revealed in a particular background. There were Jewish settlements around Madīnah. They had old friendly ties with the tribes of Aws and Khazraj. Individuals from these tribes were also on friendly terms with other individuals from the Jewish settlements. In their tribal capacity too, Aws and Khazraj were to the Jews their neighbours and allies. When these two tribes embraced Islām, they continued to maintain their old ties with them. Individuals from these tribes saw no problems in meeting their old Jewish friends with the same love and sincerity. But, Jews were so hostile to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and the religion brought by him that they were unwilling to be sincere and loving to anyone who had said yes to the prophetic call and had embraced Islām. So, they outwardly went along with the same old relationships with the Anṣārs of Madīnah, but inwardly they had turned into their enemies. The apparent friendship they had allowed to remain became their cover which they utilized in their

sinister efforts to foment trouble among Muslims so that their unity could be disintegrated. They even went to the limit of banking on this feigned friendship with Muslims to find out their organizational secrets and pass them on to the enemies.

It is this hypocritical behaviour of theirs which Allah Almighty has asked Muslims to guard against. We have been given an important rule of conduct when it was said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا بَطَانَةً مِّن دُونِكُمْ

O those who believe, do not take anyone as insider but from your own selves.

The word, *biṭānah* used here means a friend, confidant, one with whom secrets are shared. The lining or inside part of a dress which stays close to the body is also known as *biṭānah*. Derived from *batn* (inside), it is used in everything opposed to *zahr* (outside). That which is outside is *zahr* and that which is inside is *batn*. In garments, the outer part is *zihārah* and the inner part touching the body such as a lining is called *biṭānah*. [There is an expression in English - 'hand in glove' - which comes close to this sense, even if partly. It means 'to be on very intimate terms'.] Similarly, the expression, *biṭānatu-th'thawb* (بطانة الثوب) lends the metaphor of friend, confidant, one who comes to know internal secrets and that is how the word, *biṭānah* is used to carry that sense. The well-known, and quite reliable lexicon of Arabic, *Lisān al-'Arab* explains *biṭānah* as follows:

بطانة الرجل صاحب سره وداخلة امره الذي يشاوره فى احواله

It means that a person's *biṭānah* is one who knows his secrets, has access to his affairs in which he seeks his advice. Rāghib al-Isfahānī in his *Mufradāt* and al-Qurṭubī in his *Tafsīr* have given the same meaning. (The word, '*biṭānah*', translated here as 'insider' is an effort to cover some of these important shades of meaning.)

So, it has been enjoined upon Muslims through this verse that they should not take persons other than those from their own community as confidants and advisers, in a way that leads one into spilling the sensitive secrets of one's own government, community or state. No doubt, under the shade of its universal mercy, Islām has given unusual instructions to Muslims in order that they treat non-Muslims with

compassion, goodwill, beneficence, kindliness and tolerance, and not leaving it at that, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has put these in actual practice in all affairs concerning non-Muslims. But, at the same time, and in perfect wisdom, binding instructions were given so as to make sure that the organized body of Muslims and its particular hall-marks stay protected. A Muslim cannot be permitted to go beyond a certain limit when developing or promoting relations (unilateral, bi-lateral or multi-lateral) with those who disbelieve in or practice hostility against the Law of Islām. This is so because such an action throws the doors of harm and danger open both for the individuals and the community. This arrangement is clear, reasonable, appropriate, and very necessary to give secure frontiers to the individuals as well as to the Muslim state.

About non-Muslims resident in Islāmic states or those tied with Muslims through a treaty, the teachings of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and his most emphatic instructions for their protection are all part of the Islāmic law. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said:

من أذى ذميا فانا خصمه و من كنت خصمه خصمته يوم القيمة

Whoever harms a *Dhimmī* (protected non-Muslim), I shall be his opponent on the Day of Judgement and I always defeat the one whom I oppose. (Reported by Ibn Mas'ūd)

In another *ḥadīth*, he said :

منعنى ربى ان اظلم معاهدا ولا غيره

My Lord has prohibited me to wrong the one protected by a treaty, or anyone other than him. (narrated by Sayyidnā 'Alī)

In yet another *ḥadīth*, he said:

الامن ظلم معاهدا و انتقصه او كلفه فوق طاقته او اخذ منه شيئا بغير طيب نفس منه فانا حججه يوم القيمة

Beware, whoever wrongs a non-Muslim protected by treaty, or usurps his right, or obligates him to do what is beyond his power, or takes from him something without his genuine consent, then, I shall be the advocate for him (the said non-Muslim) on the day of Judgement.

Side by side with these concessions and considerations for non-

Muslims, instructions were given to Muslims that they should protect their distinct group cohesion by not trusting enemies of Islām and Muslims with their secrets. Ibn Abī Ḥātim narrates that Sayyidnā 'Umar ibn Al-Khaṭṭāb رضى الله عنه was asked to appoint a young non-Muslim as the chief manager and scribe in his office since he was very good at that. Thereupon, he said:

قد اتخذت اذا بطانة من دون المؤمنين

If I were to take him in, in that case, I will be taking an insider from among non-Muslims (which is against the Qur'anic authority).

Imām al-Qurṭubī, famous scholar and commentator of the fifth century says, with marked pensive longing, that contravention of this teaching of the Qur'ān has produced evil results for Muslims:

وقد انقلبت الاحوال فى هذه الازمان باتخاذ اهل الكتب كتبة وامناء
وتسودوا بذلك عند جهلة الاغنياء من الولاة والامراء

Things have so changed these days that Jews and Christians were trusted with secrets and considered trustworthy through which they were able to prevail over the ignorant rich, the rulers and the chiefs.

Even today, in a state established under a particular ideology, a person who does not subscribe to this ideology cannot be admitted into the inner echelons of power as a confidant. In Russia and China, a person who does not believe in communism is not given any responsible office or, farther still, trusted with state secrets. A close study of the decline of Muslim states would reveal several reasons behind it. One of the oft-repeated ones will be that Muslims had entrusted their sensitive affairs in the hands of non-Muslim confidants. This policy was an active factor in the decline of the Ottoman Caliphate as well.

The reason why this command has been given is explained soon after. Starting from لَا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ جَبَلًا (they would spare no effort to do you mischief) and ending at ان كنتم تعطون (provided that you understand), the text warns Muslims that they should not take anyone other than their own Muslim brothers as insiders on their affairs, for no other group, be they Jews, Christians, hypocrites or other disbelievers, could be their genuine well-wishers. Contrary to that, they are always on the

look out for opportunities to hoodwink and hurt them materially and spiritually. They are always plotting to harm them in this worldly life as well as to take them away from the enjoined pursuits of their Faith. All this is what the Muslims can see for themselves, but the venom that lies hidden in their hearts is far too fatal. However there are times when they are enraged with their deceptive cool front thrown off and the fangs of their deep hostility become clearly visible. Why would an intelligent person take such people as his confidant? Allah Almighty has pointed out who they are and what has to be done about them. Now it is upto him who understands what is involved here.

The sentence **وَدُّوا مَا عَنِتُّمْ** (they want you to be in trouble) is a perfect mirror of the mentality of disbelievers. Here, the in-depth teaching is that no non-Muslim can ever be the real friend and well-wisher of Muslims.

After that, in verse 119: **مَا أَشْتُمْ أَوْلَاءُ بُحَبَرِهِمْ**, Muslims have been told that 'it is certainly strange that you go about loving them as friends, yet they are no friends of yours. Indeed, they are your worst enemies. Still more unusual is the situation because you believe in all Scriptures without any reservations as to the people they address, the time when they were sent down and the prophet they were revealed to. Contrary to this, they do not accept your Book and your Prophet. Their belief in their own Books is not correct either. Given this state of affairs it would have been expected that they should have been affectionate towards you and you should have been the ones to give them a cold shoulder. But, what is happening here is just the reverse of what it should have been.'

The mentality of disbelievers has been further clarified by saying: **إِنْ يَنْصَرِكُمْ خَيْرٌ** in the first part of verse 120 which has been translated as, 'if something good happens to you, it annoys them and if something evil befalls you, they are delighted with it.'

How can Muslims remain protected against the aftermath of sinister moves of the hypocrites and the deadly hostility of opponents? For this, a simple and effective prescription was suggested in:

وَإِنْ تَصْبِرُوا وَتَتَّقُوا لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ كَيْدُهُمْ شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطٌ

And if you keep patience and fear Allah, their cunning shall

not harm you at all. Surely, Allah is All-Encompassing of what they do.

Ṣabr and Taqwā: Panacea for Muslims

The Holy Qur'ān has prescribed *ṣabr* (patience, endurance) and *Taqwā* (fear of Allah) as an effective measure against all hardships. This elemental teaching has been conveyed to Muslims not only here but also at many other places in the Qur'ān. For instance, in the section that follows immediately, it has been said:

بَلَىٰ إِنْ تَصْبِرُوا وَتَتَّقُوا وَيَأْتُوكُم مِّن فَوْرِهِمْ هَٰذَا يُمْدِدْكُمْ رَبُّكُم بِخَمْسَةِ آلَافٍ
مِّنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ مُسَوِّمِينَ

Why not? If you stay patient and fear Allah and they come upon you in this heat of theirs, your Lord will reinforce you with five thousand of the angels having distinct marks. (3:125)

Here, the promise of divine help has been made conditional upon *Ṣabr* and *Taqwā*.

In Sūrah Yūsuf, it has been said:

إِنَّهُ مَن يَتَّقِ وَيَصْبِرْ

Whoever fears Allah and keeps patience ... (12:90)

Here too, prosperity and success have been tied with *Ṣabr* and *Taqwā*. Towards the end of this very Sūrah, *Ṣabr* is being proposed in the following words:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اصْبِرُوا وَصَابِرُوا وَرَابِطُوا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

O those who believe, be patient, be more patient than others, and guard your frontiers, and fear Allah so that you may be successful. (3:200)

Once again, prosperity and success have been made dependent on *Ṣabr* and *Taqwā*.

The two words, *Ṣabr* and *Taqwā*, though looking like a short title, are nevertheless very comprehensive. They contain within themselves a successful rule for all aspects of individual and collective life as well as public, government and military affairs.

The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said, as narrated by Sayyidna

Abū Dharr رضى الله عنه :

عن ابى ذر قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم انى لاعلم اية لواخذ الناس بها لكفتهم "ومن يتق الله يجعل له مخرجا" الاية (رواه احمد)

I know a verse which, if people were to take to it, would suffice them. And that is: 'And whoever fears Allah, for him He shall make a way out (of the difficulties) - 65:2.'

Verses 121 - 123

وَإِذْ غَدَوْتَ مِنْ أَهْلِكَ تُبَوِّئُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ مَقَاعِدَ لِلْقِتَالِ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٢١﴾ إِذْ هَمَّتْ طَّائِفَتٌ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ تَفْشَلُوا وَاللَّهُ وَلِيُّهُمَا ۖ وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٢٢﴾ وَلَقَدْ نَصَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ بِبَدْرِ وَأَنْتُمْ أَذِلَّةٌ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

And when you left your house in the morning in order to place the believers in positions for fighting. And Allah is all-Hearing, all-Knowing. [121] When two of your groups were about to lose heart, while Allah was their guardian. And it is in Allah alone that the believers must place their trust. [122] And Allah certainly supported you at Badr when you were weak. So, fear Allah that you may be grateful. [123]

Sequence

In the previous verses, it was said that no power could harm Muslims if they observed patience and fear of Allah (*ṣabr* and *taqwā*). Now, the temporary set-back faced by Muslims during the battle of Uhud was due to their failure to observe these rules of conduct fully. The present verses remind Muslims of what happened during the battle of Uhud, and also, of their victory at the battle of Badr.

Commentary:

Before we proceed to explain these verses, it is appropriate that we have before us a sequence of events that came to pass at Uhud.

The background of the Battle of Uhud:

It was the month of Ramaḍān, Hijrah year 2, when the Quraysh

army and Muslim *mujāhidīn* fought a battle at Badr in which 70 well-known *kuffār* (disbelievers) of Makkah were killed and an equal number was taken prisoners. This defeat, disastrous and disgraceful as it was, and really the first instalment of Divine punishment, incensed the Quraysh; their search for revenge knew no bounds. The relatives of Quraysh chiefs who were killed at Badr, appealing to the traditional Arab pride, resolved that they would not rest until they have avenged their defeat at Badr at the hands of the Muslims. They proposed to Makkans that the sale proceeds from things brought in by their trade caravan from Syria should be spent on nothing but this war so that they can avenge the slaying of their comrades by Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم and his companions. To this, everybody agreed and it was in the Hijrah year 3 that the Quraysh, along with several other tribes as well, marched out to mount an attack on Madīnah. The invading force included even women so that they could appeal to the sense of honour their men had and implore them not to retreat, if they ever did.

When this armed force of three thousand strong, all laced with weapons and other logistics, pitched up its tents near the mountain of Uhud, about three or four miles outside Madīnah, the Holy Prophet ﷺ went into consultation with Muslims. In his blessed opinion, warding off the enemy by staying in Madīnah was easy and more likely to succeed. This was the first time that the leader of the hypocrites, 'Abdullāh ibn Ubayy, who outwardly went along with Muslims, was asked to give his opinion, which turned out to be the same as that of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. But, some zealous Muslims, who were unable to take part in the Badr encounter and were intensely eager to lay down their lives in the cause of Islām, insisted that they should go out and fight the enemy in the open so that the enemy does not take them to be cowards. To this, the majority turned.

In the meantime, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم went to his house and when he came out, he had his armour on. At that point of time, some people thought that they had forced him, against his opinion, to lead the fight outside Madīnah in the open. Realizing what they did

was wrong, they submitted to him that he could act according to his opinion and stay in Madīnah. The answer was: 'It does not behove a prophet, once he has put on his armour and taken up his arms, to put them off without fighting.' This one sentence is sufficient to clarify the difference between a prophet and a non-prophet. A prophet cannot show weakness in that capacity. Then, here lies a lesson for the community as well.

When the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم left Madīnah on his way to confront the enemy, he had about a thousand men with him, but the hypocrite 'Abdullāh ibn Ubayy broke off enroute with about three hundred men, saying: 'When my advice was rejected and action was taken on the advice of others, why should we fight and why should we endanger our lives?' Obviously, most of his comrades were hypocrites, yet there were some Muslims too who swallowed the bait and tugged along with them.

Finally, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم reached the battlefield with a total of seven hundred *mujāhidīn*. He personally took charge of the action area setting up all arrangements in a formal military manner. The formations of his men were so placed that the mount of Uḥud remained on their rear. Sayyidnā Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr was made the standard-bearer and Sayyidnā Zubayr ibn 'Awwām, the commander of the mounted troops. Sayyidnā Ḥamzah was given the command of the unarmoured. On the rear, there was some likelihood that the enemy may cut his way in from that side. So, he positioned a company of fifty archers (arrow-shooters) on a hillock in the rear and ordered them to stand on guard against any attack from that side. They were specifically instructed not to bother about the fighting down the hill, irrespective of whether they win or lose, and were told that they just do not have to move from their appointed place.

The command of the company of archers was given to Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Jubayr. As for the Quraysh, they had gone through the battle of Badr and they too went into battle formations in an orderly manner.

The Battle of Uhud ¹

When the battle started, Muslims had an upper hand right from the beginning, so much so that the enemy forces went into total disarray. Muslims thought they had won and turned toward the spoils. At this point, the archers who were appointed by the Holy Prophet ﷺ to guard the rear also noticed that the enemy was on the run and they too started coming down from the mountain leaving their assigned battle station. Their commander, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Jubayr reminded them of the emphatic command of the Holy Prophet ﷺ not to move from their place of duty and tried his best to stop them. But, except a few, others took the plea that as the order was tied with time they should now go and be with the rest. Khālīd ibn Walīd, who had not yet embraced Islām, was commanding a company of Makkan disbelievers. Making timely use of this opportunity, he went round the hill, went up through a pass and made a surprise attack. Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Jubayr رضى الله عنه and the small number of men left with him tried their best to stop them but they were unable to do so and the chargers were able to pounce on Muslim forces down the hill all of a sudden. This situation made the running enemy turn back and reinforce the attack. The fate of the battle was totally reversed. Muslims were so confused with this unexpected turn of the battle that a major portion of them scattered away from the battle field. However, some Companions were still holding on resolutely. In the meantime, a rumour went round that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has met his *shahādah* (martyrdom). This shattered the nerves of his Companions and most of them lost heart. At that time, the Holy Prophet ﷺ was in the midst of about ten or twelve very devoted Companions. He was

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1. The strategy used in this battle shows that the Prophet of Islām was not only a perfect leader and teacher, but also a creative military strategist, something not known in the world of that time. Comparing the battle plans of the two camps, Tom Under, a twentieth century historian says in his book, The Life of Muhammad that his opponents had courage and bravery but it was he who broke new ground in the management of warfare. The Makkan disbelievers fought recklessly and haphazardly while he used great foresightedness, strict discipline and efficient organization as additional assets.

injured. Defeat was about to come when, in the right moment, the Companions scattered on the battlefield came to know that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was alive. They regrouped themselves around him and moved him away towards the hill safely.

This defeat which made Muslims terribly upset was temporary, and there were causes behind it. The Holy Qur'ān comments on each cause in extremely measured words and exhorts Muslims to be cautious in the future.

Lessons from the events of Uḥud :

The events of the battle of Uḥud have in them a treasure of good advice and wise guidance for all Muslims. It will be recalled that the Qurayshi disbelievers had brought women with them so that they could excite them to fight and, in case of a retreat, put them to shame and exhort them to go back into the battle. The Holy Prophet ﷺ saw that Hindah, the wife of Abū Sufyān, was leading a group of women who were chanting poetical compositions to arouse the fighting passions of their men. They were saying:

ان تقبلوا نعانق ونفرش النمارق

اوتدبروانفارق فراق و ا مق

that is, 'if you fight right on and win, we shall embrace you and make a soft bed for you, but, if you turn back, we shall make you miss our love.'

In contrast, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم may Allah bless him, was saying this in his prayer:

اللهم بك اصول و بك اقاتل حسبى الله ونعم الوكيل

that is, 'O Allah, from Thee I draw my strength and for Thee and in Thy name, I attack and fight. Sufficient for me is Allah, the only one good to trust.'

This prayer, every word in it, is demonstrating how Muslims should strengthen their connection with Allah not only in peace, but also in war, a pattern of behaviour which is drawing a line of clear distinction between Muslims and other nations.

2. Victory in war comes from Allah and not from piles of hardware.

Let us look at this lesson through the tightly-held frame of this battle. Isn't it that the noble Companions, may Allah be pleased with them all, left behind them indelible marks of gallantry, sacrifice and dedication, the class of which would be difficult to match in history? Sayyidnā Abū Dujānah رضى الله عنه had turned his body into a shield for his beloved Prophet taking all in-coming arrows on his back. Sayyidnā Ṭalḥah رضى الله عنه had his body all perforated with arrow-heads, but he still did not leave his blessed master unprotected. Sayyidnā Anas ibn al-Naḍīr رضى الله عنه, the uncle of Sayyidnā Anas ibn Mālīk رضى الله عنه was absent from the battle of Badr which he regretted very much and longed to make amends whenever he could get the first opportunity to take part in a Jihād in the company of the Holy Prophet ﷺ.

A little later, came the battle of Uḥud and Sayyidnā Anas ibn al-Naḍīr was in it. When Muslims had scattered away and the disbelievers of Quraysh were coming in overwhelming strength, he started to mount his charge, sword in hand, when he met Sayyidnā Sa'd who was going with the group of those who had scattered away from the battlefield. He called out to him, "O Sa'd, where are you going? I smell the scent of Paradise in this valley of Uḥud." Saying this, he charged ahead and it was after a tough fight that he finally laid his life in the way of Allah. (Ibn Kathīr)

Sayyidnā Jābir رضى الله عنه says, "when Muslims became scattered, there were only eleven Companions left with the Holy Prophet ﷺ, Sayyidnā Ṭalḥah رضى الله عنه being one of them. The forces of Quraysh were surging forward. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said, 'Who is going to take care of them?' Sayyidnā Ṭalḥah رضى الله عنه responded immediately, 'I shall do that, O Messenger of Allah.' Another Companion, an Anṣārī, said, 'I am at your service.' He asked the Anṣārī Companion to go, who fought, and fell a martyr. Then came another pressure wave. He asked the same question again. Sayyidnā Ṭalḥah offered himself as before. He was all impatient to hear the command of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم so that he could go ahead. He, once again, sent some other Anṣārī Companion and Sayyidnā Ṭalḥah's wish remained unfulfilled. Thus, it was seven times that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم asked the question and every time Sayyidnā Ṭalḥah was not permitted to go while other Companions were permitted to go and

meet their *shahādah* (martyrdom).

3. Muslims were few in number, yet they won at Badr. Comparatively, they were more in number at Uhūd, yet they lost. Here too, for Muslims there is a lesson to learn: Muslims should not rely on their numerical or material strength, military hardware or logistic support, but they should make sure that they take victory as something which comes by the grace of Allah Almighty and therefore, they must always watch out that their relationship with Allah remains strong.

What happened at the battle of Yarmūk is worth remembering. The officer-in-command at the war front wrote to Sayyidnā 'Umar, the Khalīfah at Madīnah, requesting reinforcements in view of a reduced number of fighters. The reply that he gave is reproduced below:

"قد جاءني كتابكم تستمدونني واني اذلكم على من هو اعز نصراً
واحسن جنداً الله عزوجل فاستنصروه فان محمداً صلى الله عليه وسلم قد
نصر في يوم بدر في اقل من عدتكم فاذا جاءكم كتابي هذا فقاتلوهم ولا
تراجعوني". (مسند احمد، ابن كثير)

"Your letter reached me. You have requested reinforcements and I direct you to One who is most-powerful support-wise and most-protecting army-wise, that is, Allah, the Mighty, the Exalted. So, seek help from Him - because Muḥammad, may Allah bless him, was helped on the day of Badr despite their being fewer in numbers. So, when this letter of mine reaches you - fight. And do not turn back to me." (Ibn Kathīr, with reference to the Musnad of Aḥmad)

The narrator says, when they received this letter, they mounted an attack in the name of Allah, all of a sudden, against the formidable forces of disbelievers who were defeated. Sayyidnā 'Umar knew that victory or defeat for Muslims does not depend upon numbers. Instead, it depends upon trust in Allah, and on His help. This fact has been clearly stated by the Holy Qur'ān with reference to the battle of Hunayn:

يَوْمَ حُنَيْنٍ إِذْ أَعْجَبْتَكُمْ كَثُرَتْكُمْ فَلَمْ تُغْنِ عَنْكُمْ شَيْئاً

"(Remember) the day of Hunayn when you became proud about your numbers, then, nothing worked to your advantage.

Now, let us turn to the explanation of these verses:

1. Verse 121 begins with the words, **وَإِذْ غَدَوْتَ مِنْ أَهْلِكَ** (When you left your house in the morning in order to place the believers in positions for fighting).

This is an example of the miraculous style of the Holy Qur'ān, specially when it reports events. It does not describe any event in its total detail as a matter of general principle. Events, or their details are taken up only when they carry with them implied points of guidance. For instance, a particular secondary detail, such as the time of leaving the house, has been identified through the word, **غَدَوْتُ** (*ghadawta*); and *ḥadīth* narrations prove that this morning was that of the seventh of Shawwāl, Hijrah year 3.

Then comes the description of the point from where this expedition started. The word, **مِنْ أَهْلِكَ** indicates that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was with his family at that time and when the time came to leave, he left, leaving his family behind him, even though this attack was aimed at Madīnah. These secondary details have guidance built in them. When there is the command of Allah, it is expected that the love of family and home should not stop one from obeying it. It will be noticed that details of what happened between the period of leaving the house and reaching the war front remain undescribed. Instead, the first thing done on the war front has been described as **مُتَوِّى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ مَقَاعِدَ لِلْقِتَالِ**, the placing of believers in positions for fighting.

The verse ends with the words, **وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ** (And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing). By reminding Muslims of these attributes of Allah, it has been pointed out that everything said by the two parties at that time was all in the knowledge of Allah Almighty, and absolutely nothing of what happened to the two of them remains hidden from Him, and so shall it be with the end of the war; that too, is not hidden from Him.

Next comes verses 122 beginning with the words, **إِذْ هَمَّتْ طَائِفَتَانِ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ تَفْشَا** (When two of your groups tended to lose heart while Allah was their guardian). These 'two groups' refer to the Banī Ḥārithah of the tribe of Aws and Banī Salāmah of the tribe of Khazraj. These 'two groups' lost the courage to fight when they saw the hypocrite,

'Abdullāh ibn Ubayy and his men breaking away. But, Allah, in his grace, helped them come out of this state of apprehensiveness. Here, the fact was that their weakness was caused by the thought, and certainly not because of any weakness in faith. Ibn Hishām, the famous historian of Muslim battles has made this very clear. Then, the very Qur'ānic statement, **وَاللَّهُ رَئِيسُهُ** (while Allah was their guardian) is a testimony to their perfect faith. Therefore, some elders from these two tribes used to say: "No doubt, the verse contains a complaint against us, but at the same time it bears a good news for us in the words: **وَاللَّهُ رَئِيسُهُ** (while Allah was their guardian).

3. Towards the end of the verse, it has been said: "And it is in Allah alone that the believers must place their trust." Here, it has been made clear that Muslims should not rely on their superiority in men and materials. Not that they have to ignore material needs of the combat; of course, they should have whatever they can get together subject to their means, but the crucial thing is that they must place their total trust in Allah, and Allah alone. The apprehension of weakness that overtook Banū Hārithah and Banū Salāmah was caused by this material lack of strength. Therefore, *tawakkul* or trust in Allah was suggested as the treatment of all sorts of apprehensions.

Tawakkul is one of the superior human qualities. It does not mean that one should cut off all his connections with the effort to collect material support. On the contrary, one should collect what is obviously needed to the best of his ability, use it, and then, let Allah take care of the outcome. It is also necessary that one should not become proud of what has been collected as material assets, instead, "We trust in Allah" should be the sole concern. The good example of the Holy Prophet **صلى الله عليه وسلم** is before us. That he himself organized the fighting strength of Muslims during this *Jihād*, assembled weapons and other war materials to the best of his ability, prepared battle plans appropriate to the time and place. Once on the war front, he set up entrenchments with combat-ready Companions placed therein. These were all part of the material-functional management of the battle. By making use of these with his own blessed hands, our beloved master, the last and foremost of prophets, demonstrated that material facilities are also a blessing of Allah Almighty. Ignoring them

or turning away from them cannot be called what *tawakkul* is. Here, the attitude of a Muslim slightly differs from that of a non-Muslim. A Muslim would, given his ability and means, collect all sorts of necessary material support, yet when it comes to trust and *tawakkul* that he would place in none but Allah. The non-Muslim is bereft of this spiritual dimension for he relies on his brute material strength. The manifestation of this difference has been common sight throughout all Islāmic battles.

4. The focus now turns to a particular battle where Muslims had demonstrated perfect *tawakkul* and Allah Almighty had blessed them with support and success. The reference to the battle of Badr, in the following words, has appeared in this very context.

وَلَقَدْ نَصَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ بِبَدْرٍ وَأَنْتُمْ أَذِلَّةٌ

And Allah certainly supported you at Badr when you were weak. (123)

Badr : Location and Importance

Badr is located about eighty miles south-west of Madīnah and used to be a halting-place while travelling between Makkah and Madīnah, before the modern *Tarīq al-Hijrah* was commissioned into service which bypasses it.

At that time, Badr was known for its abundance of water, something very important in the desert zones of Arabia. The first armed encounter between believers and disbelievers came to pass at this spot on Friday, Ramaḍān al-Mubārak, Hijrah year 2 which fell on March 11, 624 A.D. On a superficial view, this battle appears to be a local tribal war, but the truth is that it has charted a revolutionary course in the history of the world, therefore, the Holy Qur'an calls it *Yawm al-Furqān* (a day of distinction). According to Professor Philip Hitti, this was Islām's first clear victory.

The expression *وَأَنْتُمْ أَذِلَّةٌ* translated as 'when you were weak' means that 'you were, at that time, few in numbers and materials'. According to strong and authentic narrations, the number of Muslims was 313. This 'army' had two horses and seventy camels. On these, they took their turns while riding.

The verse ends with the statement: *فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُشْكُرُونَ* (So, fear Allah, that you may be grateful). This may remind one of the many places in the Holy Qur'an where *Taqwā* (fear of Allah) and *Ṣabr* (patience) have been prescribed as a security shield against the machinations of the hypocrites and the harmful effects of hostile enemies. Right here, in these two behaviour models, there lies the secret of an entire organized struggle, and clear victory, that comes in its wake. As mentioned elsewhere, *taqwā* and *ṣabr* have not been mentioned here, in conjunction. Instead, *taqwā* has been considered sufficient for, in reality, *taqwā* is such a comprehensive human attribute that *ṣabr* too gets to be included therein.

Verses 124 - 129

إِذْ تَقُولُ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَلَنْ يَكْفِيَكُمْ أَنْ يُمِدَّكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ بِثَلَاثَةِ آلَافٍ
مِّنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ مُنْزَلِينَ ﴿١٢٤﴾ بَلَىٰ إِنْ تَصْبِرُوا وَتَتَّقُوا وَيَأْتُوكُم
مِّن فَوْرِهِمْ هَٰذَا يُمِدِّدْكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ بِخَمْسَةِ آلَافٍ مِّنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ
مُسَوِّمِينَ ﴿١٢٥﴾ وَمَا جَعَلَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بُشْرَىٰ لَكُمْ وَلِتَطْمَئِنَّ
قُلُوبُكُمْ بِهِ ۖ وَمَا النَّصْرُ إِلَّا مِنْ عِندِ اللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَكِيمِ
﴿١٢٦﴾ لِيَقْطَعَ طَرَفًا مِّنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَوْ يَكْبِتَهُمْ فَيَنْقَلِبُوا
خَآئِبِينَ ﴿١٢٧﴾ لَيْسَ لَكَ مِنَ الْأَمْرِ شَيْءٌ أَوْ يَتُوبَ عَلَيْهِمْ
أَوْ يُعَذِّبُهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ ظَالِمُونَ ﴿١٢٨﴾ وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمُوتِ وَمَا
فِي الْأَرْضِ ۖ يَغْفِرُ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَن يَشَاءُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ
رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٢٩﴾

When you were saying to the believers, "Shall it not suffice you that your Lord should help you with three thousand of the angel sent down (for you)?" [124] Why not? If you stay patient and fear Allah and they come upon you even in this heat of theirs, your Lord will reinforce you with five thousand of the angels having distinct marks. [125] And Allah did it only that it be a good news for you and that your hearts may be at rest with it. And help is from none but Allah, the All-

Powerful, the All-Wise. [126] **That He may cut off a flank of disbelievers or throw them down in disgrace, and they go back frustrated.** [127] **You have no authority in the matter, unless Allah forgives them or punishes them, as they are unjust.** [128] **And to Allah belongs what is in the heavens and what is in the earth. He forgives whomsoever He wills and punishes whomsoever He wills. And Allah is Most-Forgiving, Very-Merciful.** [129]

Commentary

In the previous verses, the battle of Badr was cited in relation to the battle of Uhud. Briefly stated there was the unseen support from Allah Almighty given to Muslims. In the present verses, some details of that support have been mentioned. Also stated is the wisdom behind the sending of angels.

One may naturally ask a question here. When Allah Almighty has endowed His angels with such power that just one of them could overturn an entire habitation, very much like what happened with the land of the people of Lūṭ عليه السلام which was overturned single-handedly by the angel Jibra'īl, why was it necessary to send out an army of angels? In addition to that, given the introduction of angels onto the battlefield, the obvious result should have been the total annihilation of every single infidel.

The Holy Qur'ān has, itself, given the answer in the verse وَمَا جَعَلَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بُشْرَىٰ. It means that the purpose behind the sending of angels was not really to help score a victory on the battlefield. Instead, the purpose was to give the believers the good news of victory to comfort them and to strengthen their hearts. This is very clear from the words إِلَّا بُشْرَىٰ (only that it be a good news) and لِّنُظْمِنَ قُلُوبَكُمْ (that your hearts may be at rest) in the text. Far more clear are the words of Sūrah al-Anfāl about this event: فَثَبِّتُوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا (So, make those who believe firm - 8:12). Here, the address is to the angels and they have been asked to see that Muslims do not get anxious and that their hearts stay firm.

How can hearts be made to stay firm? There are many possible ways, one of them could be through their spiritual input, something not too dissimilar to the direct beaming of attention as practiced by mystic *shaykhs*.

The possibility of doing this in several less complex forms also exists. For instance, they may simply assure the believers that angels are standing ready to help them - by appearing before them, by their voice signs or by some other method - as was witnessed in the battle of Badr where all these methods were used. In fact, in one exegetic explanation of the verse *فَاَضْرِبُوا اَلْاَعْنَاقَ* (So, strike over the necks - 8:12), this address is to the angels. According to some *ḥadīth* narrations, when an angel decided to attack a disbeliever, the head of the disbeliever slid off his body all by itself.¹ It has also been reported that some noble Companions heard the voice of Jibrā'il saying, 'Charge, Haizūm!' ² Some of them saw some angels (Muslim). All these sensory experiences are part of the same chain of Divine support. Evidences prove that the angels of Allah did a few things to impress upon Muslims that the angels too are participating in fighting as a sort of assurance that His support through the angels is there. As said earlier, their objective was far from winning a war for the believers. Their real mission was to comfort Muslims and to give their hearts strength. That the obligation of *Jihād* has been placed on men in this mortal world, and that is how they are enabled to deserve merits and ranks in the Hereafter, is a clear proof of this view. If Allah Almighty had willed that countries be conquered through armies of angels, the very name of disbelief and disbelievers would have been effaced from the face of the earth, not to say much about governments and empires. But, in this system of the material world, Allah Almighty has not just willed it so. Here, disbelief and faith, obedience and sin shall continue to exist side by side. The great divide shall come on the Day of Resurrection when the true and the false shall become all distinct.

The rationale of the promises:

Let us now turn to the promises of angelic help in the battle of Badr. The verse of Sūrah al-Anfāl carries the promise of one thousand angels. In the present verse of Sūrah 'Al-'Imrān, the promise begins with three thousand, then goes up to five. What is the wisdom behind this?

The fact is that Muslims noticed the thousand-strong force of the

1. From Sahl ibn Ḥanīf vide Al-Ḥākim and Baihaqī.

2. The steed of Jibrā'il.

enemy in the battle of Badr, as stated in Sūrah al-Anfāl, and compared it with their total count of three hundred and thirteen, so they invoked the help of Allah Almighty against such heavy odds. Thereupon, came the promise of one thousand angels, implying thereby that the number of their enemy shall be matched by an identical number of angels. The words of the verse are:

إِذْ تَسْتَغِيثُونَ رَبَّكُمْ فَاسْتَجَابَ لَكُمْ أَنِّي مُمِدُّكُمْ بِأَلْفٍ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ مُرَوِّفِينَ

When you were calling your Lord for help, so He responded to you (saying): I am going to support you with one thousand of the angels, one following the other. (8:12)

Even after this verse, the same purpose behind the sending of angels was made clear by saying: "And Allah did it, only that it be a good news for you, and that your hearts may be at rest with it."

Then comes the present verse of Sūrah 'Al-'Imrān. Here, the promise of three thousand angels was probably made due to the reports received by Muslims that Kūrẓ ibn Jābir Muḥārībī was marching towards the battlefield of Badr with his tribal forces in support of the disbelievers of Makkah (as in Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī). The actual position in the confrontation was that the enemy forces were already three times larger than those of Muslims, who were somewhat disturbed by this news. Thereupon, a promise of three thousand angels was made so that the ratio is reversed and the number of Muslims goes three times higher than that of the enemy.

After that, right there towards the end of this verse, this number was increased, subject to conditions, to five thousand. The conditions were:

- A. That Muslims shall hold on firmly to the great qualities of *ṣabr* (patience) and *taqwā* (fear of Allah).
- B. That they come under enemy attack all of a sudden.

Out of these two conditions, the second one did not just materialize, therefore, the promise of the number, five thousand, did not remain effective. Granted that the second condition of the promise did not come to pass, major commentators and historians differ as to the actual fulfillment of the promise - was it in the form of five thousand or three thousand only? All these positions have been mentioned in

Ruḥ al-Ma'ānī.

From the verse **لَيْسَ لَكَ مِنَ الْأَمْرِ شَيْءٌ** (You have no authority in the matter) (128), the text returns to the main event of Uḥud after a brief mention of the event of Badr in between. This verse was revealed in the background of the battle of Uḥud where the Holy Prophet ﷺ lost one of his teeth, the lower right premolar, to be exact. His face injured, he is reported to have uttered: 'How shall such people prosper, people who do this to their prophet, although that prophet is calling them towards God?'. Thereupon, this verse was revealed.

According to yet another story from the Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been reported to have invoked evil fate for some disbelievers, whereupon came the revelation of this verse in which the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been counselled to remain patient and forbearing.¹

Verses 130 - 131

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَأْكُلُوا الرِّبَا أَضْعَافًا مُضَاعَفَةً وَاتَّقُوا
اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٣٠﴾ وَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتِي أُعِدَّتْ
لِلْكَافِرِينَ ﴿١٣١﴾

O those who believe, do not eat *Ribā* (interest) doubled and multiplied. And fear Allah so that you may be successful. [130] And fear the Fire that has been prepared for the disbelievers. [131]

The meaning of doubled and multiplied

The detailed rules regarding '*ribā*' and the philosophy underlying its prohibition have been discussed thoroughly in Sūrah al-Baqarah verses 275-278 (Volume 1 of this commentary). However, it may be pointed out here that words **أَضْعَافًا مُضَاعَفَةً** (doubled and multiplied) used in this verse do not mean that the prohibition of '*ribā*' is restricted only to a transaction where the interest is doubled or multiplied. In fact, these words are not used in a restrictive sense, because it is evident from Sūrah al-Baqarah that '*ribā*' or interest is prohibited in any case, even though its rate is not so high as to make it doubled or multiplied.

1. Bayān al-Qur'ān.

These words are used only to explain the factual position prevalent at that time, and to indicate its unjust and evil nature. Moreover, these words also suggest that even the interest charged is simple and not compound, yet once a person is engaged in the business of interest he does not stop at charging interest in one transaction only. Rather, he reinvests the income of interest in another loan transaction, and keeps investing the interest proceeds in similar transactions again and again, and thus the ultimate result is that the original interest charged through the first transaction is doubled and multiplied.

Verses 132 - 133

وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ﴿١٣٢﴾ وَسَارِعُوا إِلَى
مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ عَرْضُهَا السَّمُوتُ وَالْأَرْضُ ۖ أُعِدَّتْ
لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١٣٣﴾

And obey Allah and the Messenger so that you may be blessed. [132] And race one another towards Forgiveness from your Lord and towards a paradise the width of which spans the heavens and the earth. It has been prepared for the God-fearing. [133]

Commentary

In the previous verse, Muslims were commanded to abstain from interest-based dealings, a sin which deprives them of the quality of *taqwā*, (the fear of Allah, the sense of responsibility before Him).

The present verses stress the positive aspects of *taqwā* and complement the earlier subject alongwith the promise of reward for those who observe it. Worth remembering throughout one's life is the second point which will serve him well if taken as the guiding light and the constant orientation. Allah Almighty has made it clear in these verses that the obedience to Allah and His Messenger does not become genuine and effective through lip-service alone. Instead, the obedient ones are known by what they are and what they do, by their traits of character and their deeds.

The obedience of Allah and His Messenger

The first verse, in a brief statement, presents a cardinal command of Faith in the following words: وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ (And obey Allah

and the Messenger so that you may be blessed). Here, in order that one becomes deserving of Divine mercy, the obedience to Allah Almighty has been declared necessary and binding, and along with it, the obedience of the Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم has been made equally necessary and binding. This is something not limited to this verse alone. It has been repeatedly stressed throughout the Holy Qur'an. The pattern of combining the command to obey Allah Almighty, immediately followed by the command to obey the Messenger, appears in the Qur'an again and again. These continued and constant statements of the Holy Qur'an are there to remind human beings that these are the basic principles of Islām and 'Imān. The first part of the Faith is to affirm and declare the existence of God, His Oneness, and that man is there to worship and obey Him. The second part is the confirmation of His Messenger, and of obedience to him.

Also worth noting are the statements of the Holy Qur'an which prove that, whatever the noble Messenger صلى الله عليه وسلم says is by Divine permission and not on his own. The Holy Qur'an says:

وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ ۚ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ

And he (the messenger) does not speak out of his own desire.

It is not but a revelation revealed (to him) (53:3)

From this, we arrive at the conclusion that the obedience to the Messenger is the very same as the obedience to Allah. It is nothing separate from it. In Sūrah Al-Nisā' (4:80), the Holy Qur'an has made it more clear in the following words:

مَنْ يَطِيعِ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ

And whoever obeys the Messenger, he surely obeys Allah.

(4:80)

With this in view, the question is: Why have the two 'obediences' been stated separately? What purpose does it serve? Specially so, when this appears as a consistent feature in the Holy Qur'an where we see both 'obediences' being commanded side by side.

To unfold the secret, we can say that Allah Almighty sent a Book to guide man in this world, and a Messenger. The Messenger was charged with the following duties:

- (1) That he convey to people the verses of the Holy Qur'an precisely and exactly in the form they were spoken when revealed.
- (2) That he should cleanse people of outward and inward impurities.
- (3) That he should teach the community, not only the contents of the Book, but also its purpose.
- (4) That he should teach people wisdom along with the Book.

This subject appears at several places in the Holy Qur'an almost identically in the form of:

يَقْلُؤْا عَلَيْهِمُ الْبَيِّهَ وَيُزَكِّيهِمُ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ

... who recites to them His verses and makes them pure and teaches them the Book and the wisdom ...

This tells us that the obligatory functions of the Messenger are not simply limited to conveying the Qur'an to the people. There is more to it in that the Messenger is also responsible for teaching the Book, and clarifying its message. Also obvious is the fact that the addressees of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم were the eloquent people of Arabia who had command over the finer points of the Arabic language. Teaching of the Holy Qur'an to them could never mean that they were to be taught the literal meaning of the Qur'anic words, for they themselves understood all that perfectly well. Instead, the purpose of this teaching and clarification was, and could be nothing else, that an injunction of the Qur'an stated briefly or in a summary form should be clarified and elaborated upon by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and communicated to people with the help of a revelation which did not form a part of the Qur'an (*wahy ghayr al-matluww*: the unrecited revelation). On the other hand, this was inspired into his blessed heart. The verse of the Holy Qur'an إِنَّ هَؤُلَاءِ لَأَوْحَى بُرْهَانِي (It is not but a revelation revealed) cited a little earlier, points in this direction.

Let us understand this through some instances. There are a good many occasions in the Holy Qur'an where the text does not go beyond saying: أَقِمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ (Establish the *ṣalāh* and pay the *zakaḥ*). Even if units of prayer come to be mentioned, such as *qiyām*, *rukū* and *sajdah*, they remain totally undefined. The modality, outward and inward, is just not there. It was angel Jibra'il who came as

commanded by Allah and taught all the details through demonstration before the Holy Prophet ﷺ. This was how the Holy Prophet ﷺ conveyed the word and the deed to the people of his *Ummah*.

There are details about the payment of *zakāh*: What are thresholds? How much has to be paid on each threshold? What part of a person's possessions is *zakātable*? What part is non-*zakātable*? How much from threshold resources goes *zakāt*-free?: All such details were given by the Messenger of Allah صلى الله عليه وسلم. He even had these committed to writing as executive orders and passed on to several Companions.

Take yet another example. They Holy Qur'ān says: لَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَكُم بَيْنَكُم بِإِلْبَاطٍ (And do not eat up each other's property by false means - 2:188).

Now there are deals and transactions of all sorts, such as buying and selling, rentals, tenancy, wages and many more. What forms are unjust, inequitable or harmful to public interest, and therefore, *bāṭil* or false? All these details were given to the community by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم by the leave of Allah. Similarly, this is true about all legal rulings of Islāmic Law.

Since all such details were conveyed to the community by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in fulfillment of his prophetic mission and under the guidance of Divine revelation, and since these details do not appear in the Holy Qur'ān, there was the likelihood that the uninitiated may be deceived into believing that these detailed rulings were not given by Allah Almighty and, therefore, they do not have to be carried out necessarily as part of one's obedience to Allah. It is for this reason that Allah Almighty has made the obedience of the messenger binding alongwith the obedience to Him, at various places in the Qur'ān, repeatedly. As such, the obedience of the Messenger is really nothing but the obedience of Allah Almighty, but, given its external appearance and detailed description, it is somewhat different from that. In view of this, it has been emphasised time and again that orders given by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم should be obeyed as if they were the very orders of Allah the obedience of which was mandatory. These may be there in the Qur'ān, open and clear, or may just not be there. They were still equally binding on the community.

This was a matter of crucial importance, not limited to someone falling in doubt. In fact, there were chances that the enemies of Islām would find an excuse to inject chaos in a basic Islāmic principle, and thereby make an effort to lead Muslims away from the right path. Therefore, the Holy Qur'ān has dealt with this subject in a variety of ways, in addition to its literal stress on the obedience to the Messenger. It has informed the blessed community of Muḥammad ﷺ that his duties include not only the teaching of the Book but also the added teaching of wisdom, pointing out to the fact that there are elements other than the words of the Book, which are also included in his teachings. That part too, identified as wisdom, has to be followed by Muslims as a matter of obligation.

As said earlier, the Holy Qur'ān used a variety of ways to focus on the same subject. For instance, it was said: *لِيُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ* which means that the purpose behind sending the Messenger is that he should explain for people the meanings and objectives of the verses revealed to him. (16:44) Then, there is the oft-quoted verse:

مَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا

Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it, and whatever he forbids you, refrain from it (59:7).

All these ramifications have been placed there lest there comes a person saying: 'We have been obligated to follow only that which appears in the Qur'ān; what we do not find in the Qur'ān, to that we are not obligated.' Perhaps, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had foreseen the problems which were to arise later when some people, in order to get rid of the teachings and explanations of the Messenger of Allah, would say 'For us, the Book of Allah is sufficient.' The Holy Prophet ﷺ has described this possibility in a *ḥadīth*, very clearly. The *ḥadīth* has been reported by al-Tirmidhī, Abū Dawūd, Ibn Mājah, al-Baihaqī and Imām Aḥmad in the following words:

لا الفين احدكم متكئا على اريكته ياتيه الامر من امرى مما امرت به
اونهيت عنه فيقول لا ادرى ما وجدنا فى كتاب الله اتبعناه

... Lest I find one of you, reclining on his coach making comments on an order from my orders in which I bid something or forbid something, saying, 'This we do not know. We

only follow what we find in the Book of Allah'.

Conclusion:

In short, the repeated stress on the obedience of the Messenger alongwith the obedience of Allah Almighty, as well as, specific instructions to follow the dictates of the Messenger at various places are there to counter the dangerous ignorance of a person who may venture to separate the details of Qur'ānic injunctions described by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, and available in the treasure-house of his *aḥādīth*, making it look like something foreign to the obedience of Allah, and consequently may hasten to reject them. The reality is that they cannot be separated:

گفته او گفته الله بود

گرچه از حلقوم عبد الله بود

What he said was said by Allah

Voiced, though, it was by a slave of Allah

Race towards forgiveness, towards Paradise :

The first command was: 'Obey the Messenger'. (132) The second command is: 'Race one another towards Forgiveness from your Lord and towards Paradise.' (133) Here, Forgiveness stands for the means of obtaining forgiveness, that is, good deeds which bring forth forgiveness. There are several exegetic views reported from the blessed Companions and their immediate successors. Though expressed differently, they convey the same theme. Out of the noble Companions and their successors, may Allah be pleased with them all, Sayyidnā 'Alī explained it as 'the fulfillment of obligations', Ibn 'Abbās as 'Islām', Abū al-'Āliyah as 'Hijrah', Anas ibn Malīk as 'al-Takbīr al-Ūulā (the first call of *Allahū Akbar* in *ṣalāh*)', Sa'īd ibn Jubayr as 'perfection of obedience', Daḥḥāk as 'Jihād' and 'Ikrimah as '*Taubah* (repentance)'. The outcome of all these sayings is that Forgiveness covers all good deeds which become the means of obtaining Divine forgiveness.

At this point two things need our attention. First comes the resolution of an apparent contradiction which may be felt when one notices that the present verse carries a command to race one another towards Forgiveness and Paradise, while through another verse: لَا تَتَمَنَّوْا مَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهِ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ (And do not covet something by which Allah has made

some of you excel some others - 4:32), the very seeking of other merits and ranks has been prohibited.

The answer is that *faḍā'il* (merits, ranks, virtues) are of two kinds. The first kind relates to that which cannot be achieved by man, being beyond one's power and control. We can call these 'non-electable.' For example, colour or beauty or birth in a morally high family cannot be chosen and acquired. The other kind is something man can achieve by effort. These can be called voluntary or 'electable'. So, the reason why the effort to acquire non-electable merits, even its very desire, has been prohibited for the simple reason that they have been given to His created beings by Allah Almighty Himself in His infinite wisdom. It is something beyond human effort. Why run after them? All such efforts will lead to nothing but envy and malice. Let him who has been given a particular colour of his skin keep desiring to have some other colour. What is he going to get out of his desire? Nothing. However, there is a vast range of meritworthy deeds. One could, and would, make his mark there. That is why we have been asked to accelerate our efforts in that direction. This is not something restricted to one verse. The exhortation appears in several verses. Somewhere it is said: فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ (Try to get ahead of one another in good deeds - 2:148, 5:48). Elsewhere it is said: وَفِي ذَلِكَ فَلْيَتَنَافَسِ الْمُتَنَافِسُونَ (And in this, then, aspire the aspirers.) (83:26)

Let us consider the advice of the sage who said: 'If one has a natural or physical handicap which is beyond his power to correct, he should remain contented (with his handicap) and unaffected by the achievements of others. He should go on doing what he does. For, if he were to pine over his handicap and envy the achievements of others, he would be unable to perform to his capability, and ultimately, he would end up doing nothing or very little.'

The second point worth considering is that Allah Almighty has mentioned 'Forgiveness' first and the 'Paradise' after it. May be, this is to suggest that entry into Paradise is impossible without Divine Forgiveness. The reason is obvious. Man may spend a life-time doing good and abstaining from the evils. Still the aggregate of his good deeds cannot pay the price of Paradise. What will take him to Paradise is only Forgiveness of His Lord, and His grace. The Holy Prophet ﷺ

has said:

سَدِّدُوا وَقَارِبُوا وَأَنْشِرُوا، فَإِنَّهُ لَنْ يُدْخِلَ أَحَدًا الْجَنَّةَ عَمَلُهُ، قَالُوا: وَلَا أَنْتَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ؟ قَالَ: وَلَا أَنَا إِلَّا أَنْ يَتَغَمَّدَنِي اللَّهُ بِرَحْمَتِهِ

Strive to be straight and true, take the middle course and seek glad tidings (of Allah's grace), for one's deeds shall not take anyone into the Paradise'. People said: 'Not even yours, O Messenger of Allah?' He said: 'Not even mine, unless it is that Allah covers me up with His mercy.' (al-Targhib wa al-Tarhīb, with reference to al-Bukhārī and Muslim).

In short, our deeds are not the price of Paradise. But, as is the customary practice of Allah, He does bestow His grace upon a servant who does what is good. In fact, one who is given the very ability to do good deeds is really given the signal that Allah is pleased with him. So, let none of us be tardy in the performance of what is good. Since Divine forgiveness is the primary factor in one's entry into the Paradise, the text takes this importance into consideration and does not present forgiveness in the absolute sense. It has, rather, elected to say: مُغْفِرَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ (Forgiveness from your Lord). By doing so, the text highlights Allah's attribute as the Lord, showing thereby His added grace and mercy for His servants.

The second object towards which man is being asked to hasten is Paradise. It has been said here that the Paradise is as wide as whole of the heavens and the earth. Since human mind cannot conceive any greater vastness than that of the heavens and the earth within the confines of his experience, the Paradise has been likened to them. This is a manner of saying that Paradise is very vast, so vast that it can accommodate the entire heavens and the earth in its vastness.

When the width of the Paradise is so great who can imagine its length which should be even greater?

All the above discussion is based on the assumption that the Arabic word عرض ('ard) means 'width'. However, there is another possible interpretation adopted by some commentators. According to them the word 'ard' is also used in the meaning of 'price'. If the word is taken here in this sense, the verse would mean that Paradise is not an ordinary commodity; the entire heavens and the earth are its price.

With such an object of unimaginable worth and magnitude, what else should one do but hasten towards it.

Al-Rāzī in his 'al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr explains this point as follows:

قال ابو مسلم: ان العرض هنا ما يعرض من الثمن فى مقابلة المبيع اى ثمنها لو بيعت كثمن السموت والارض و المراد بذلك عظم مقدارها وجلالة خطرها وانه لا يساويها شئ وان عظم .

Abū Muslim says that 'al-'ard' in this verse means that which is offered against the object of sale as its price. In other words, if a price were to be put on Paradise, the heavens and the earth together with whatever is in them will be its price. The purpose is to demonstrate the most exalted status of the Paradise which remains unmatched by anything in its greatness.

Another statement about the Paradise is given in the end by: **أَعِدَّتْ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ** (It has been prepared for the God-fearing.) This tells us that Paradise has already been created. Clear indicators in the Qur'an and Hadīth seem to suggest the existence of Paradise on the seventh heaven which is its surface.

Verses 134 - 138

الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ فِي السَّرَّاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَالْكُظُمِينَ الْغَيْظِ
وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٣٤﴾ وَالَّذِينَ
إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا
لِدُنُوبِهِمْ ۖ وَمَنْ يَغْفِرِ الدُّنُوبَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ ۖ وَلَمْ يُصِرُّوا عَلَى
مَا فَعَلُوا وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٣٥﴾ أُولَٰئِكَ جَزَاؤُهُمْ مَّغْفِرَةٌ مِّن
رَّبِّهِمْ وَجَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ۖ وَنَعَمُ
أَجْرُ الْعَمِلِينَ ﴿١٣٦﴾ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ سُنَنٌ ۖ فَسِيرُوا فِي
الْأَرْضِ فَانظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُكْذِبِينَ ﴿١٣٧﴾ هَٰذَا بَيَانٌ
لِّلنَّاسِ وَهُدًى وَمَوْعِظَةٌ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١٣٨﴾

...Those who spend in prosperity and adversity and those who control anger and forgive people. And Allah loves those who do good [134] - and those who, when they happen to commit a shameful act or wrong themselves, remember Allah, then, seek forgiveness for their sins - and who is there to forgive sins except Allah? - and do not persist in what they have done, knowingly. [135] Their reward is forgiveness from their Lord and gardens beneath which rivers flow where they shall live forever. And excellent is the reward of those who work. [136] A number of behaviour patterns have passed before you. So, traverse the land, and see what was the fate of those who belied (the prophets). [137] This is a declaration for mankind, and a guidance, and a lesson for the God-fearing. [138]

Commentary

God-fearing Muslims can be identified by the traits of their character and the marks of their manner. So many benefits lie hidden behind their example and practice. This is the subject of the present verses.

Allah Almighty has made God-fearing Muslims to live as models for others. For instance, the Holy Qur'an has, at so many places, emphasised the need to seek guidance and benefit from the company of the men of Allah. The verse: *صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ* (the path of those whom You have blessed - 1:6) from Sūrah al-Fātiḥah clearly indicates that the straight and correct path of Faith has to be learnt from these very favoured servants of Allah. Then, there is the exhortation: *كُونُوا مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ* .. (be with the truthful - 9:119) which shows how useful the company of such people really is. But there are all sorts of people in the world, including the clever ones who would pose as good and try to impersonate the genuine ones. For this reason, it was necessary to draw a fine line of distinction between the true and the false and to show how the favoured men of Allah can be identified by their special traits of character. Once this is known, people would abstain from wrong leaders and guides and would use the God-given guidance to first become sure of the true ones and then follow them.

By having identified the traits and marks of God-fearing Muslims, and having stated that they are the ones deserving of ultimate success

and of elevated stations in Paradise, the righteous have been given a good news (of receiving the same reward, if they follow them) and the evil-doers are exhorted and persuaded to mend themselves and follow the God-fearing.

This is exactly what has been hinted at in هَذَا بَيَانٌ لِلنَّاسِ وَهُدًى وَمَوْعِظَةٌ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ (This is a declaration for mankind, and a guidance, and a lesson for the God-fearing - 3:138), appearing towards the end of these verses. While describing the traits and marks of the God-fearing, the qualities relating to human rights and social behaviour have been mentioned first, and the qualities relating to the rights of Allah after them. This is to indicate that the rights of Allah, despite their supreme status above all rights, are not meant to benefit Allah in any way. Allah does not need any of them, nor does he stand to suffer in any way whatsoever, if they are not fulfilled.

His Being is absolutely free of all these concerns. The one who worships Him is the one who gains. Moreover He is Very-Merciful, therefore, whenever a person falls short in the fulfillment of His rights, he may regret any time for what he did, turn to Him and repent genuinely and sincerely, whereby all his sins can be instantly forgiven from that eternal fountain of Mercy and Nobility. Contrary to this, there is the case of the rights of the servants of Allah - man has to fulfil these. In addition to that, if A has rights against B and B does not fulfil those rights, naturally A runs into loss. It is not that easy to forgive and forget loss suffered by one human being at the hands of the other. Therefore, *Huqūqul-'Ibād* or the rights of the servants of Allah have particular importance of their own.

Moreover, the correct balance in our universal order and the reformed pattern of our human society hinges on the fulfillment of mutual rights. A slight short-fall in this direction can trigger disorders, fights and wars. Conversely, should high morals be inculcated and practiced, even enemies would turn into friends. Feuds raging through centuries can subside into peace and bliss. This is one more reason why traits and marks relating to human rights have been taken up first.

Verse 134 announces the first of these traits as follows:

The habit of spending in the way of Allah in prosperity and adversity:

The verse reads: **الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ فِي السَّرَّاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ** (Those who spend in the way of Allah in prosperity and adversity). It means that they are so used to spending for the good pleasure of Allah that they do spend whatever they can under all conditions, be it prosperity or adversity - more from more and less from less. Three points of guidance emerge from this statement:

1. That those poor should not consider themselves to be totally free from the obligation of spending in the way of Allah. By doing so, they may be depriving themselves of the open opportunity to spend in His way, for the status of spending one dollar out of a thousand dollars is the same with Allah Almighty as is the status of spending one penny out of a thousand pennies. For all practical purposes, the way the owner of a thousand dollars does not find it all that difficult to spend one dollar in the way of Allah, very similarly, the owner of a thousand pennies should not really be hurt by spending one penny.

2. On the other hand, the point made here is that those who keep on spending within the limitations of their capacity to spend, specially when their circumstances are straightened, would discover to their delight that, by doing so, the blessed style of giving and the wonderful habit of sharing with others less fortunate has come to stay and that it will not go extinct. May be, the very benedictory quality of such conduct draws mercy from Allah Almighty and He, in His infinite grace, bestows on such a person new openings and new increases in his means of sustenance.

3. Yet another beneficial aspect of this guidance is worthy of serious notice. Think of one who is in the habit of spending what he has on other human beings, making it possible for them to benefit through his efforts, helping the poor, the needy and the deprived. It is obvious that such a person would never even think of usurping the rights of others against their wishes.

So, the core of this quality of character is that true Muslims, the God-fearing and the favoured servants of Allah, are always on the look out for opportunities to pass on benefits to other human beings irrespective of their being rich or poor. There was an occasion when Sayy-

idah 'Ā'ishah, may Allah be pleased with her, gave away one, just one piece of grape in charity because she had absolutely nothing with her at that time. According to another early report, there was a time when she gave one onion in charity. The Holy Prophet ﷺ has said:

اتقوا النار ولو بشق تمرة وردوا السائل ولو بظلف شاة

Guard yourself against the Fire even if it be by giving a piece of date in charity and do not turn back one who begs empty-handed even if it be by giving a cloven hoof from a goat.

In a ḥadīth reported by Imām al-Rāzī in his al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr it is said that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, on a certain day, exhorted people to spend in charity. In response, those who had gold and silver with them lost no time in giving these out in charity. Somebody brought date-flakes because he had nothing else to give away. The date-flakes were accepted and given in charity. Then came another person who said: 'O Messenger of Allah, I have nothing to spend in charity, however, I am known as a man of honour among my people, so I give my sense of honour in charity, after which I shall never be angry with a person in future, no matter how much he insults me.'

The teachings of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and the way they were understood and practiced by the noble Companions, may Allah be pleased with them all, make it obvious that spending in the way of Allah is not limited to the well-to-do and the wealthy. This quality of character can also be possessed by the poor and the less fortunate. They too can have that great attribute by spending in the way of Allah a little of whatever they can in proportion to their respective capacities.

Not By Wealth Alone: Other Options of Spending in the Way of Allah:

It is important to note at this point that the Holy Qur'ān uses the word **يُسْفِرُونَ** which means that they spend in the way of Allah under all conditions, of prosperity and of adversity. However, it does not determine the 'what' of spending. The generality of the statement here seems to suggest that it includes, not only money, but everything else that can be 'spent'. For example, one who 'spends' his time and labour in the way of Allah, he too shall be credited with the quality of *infāq fī*

sabīlillāh or spending in the way of Allah. The *ḥadīth* quoted above supports this view.

The Wisdom behind the mention of prosperity and adversity:

May be, these are the two conditions of life in which man habitually tends to forget Allah. He will do that when very rich and upto the neck in luxury. He could also do that, fairly often, when worrying about his adversity. So, the verse clearly settles that the favoured servants of Allah are unique in their character who never forget Allah, neither in luxury nor in distress.

How aptly the last Moghul Emperor of Dehli, Bahadur Shah Zafar made this Qur'ānic idea the subject of his poetry when he said:

ظفر آدمی اس کو نہ جانیے گا خواہ کتنا ہی صاحب فہم و ذکا
جسے عیش میں یاد خدا نہ رہی جسے طیش میں خوف خدا نہ رہا
'O Zafar, not much of a man is he,
no matter how wise he be,
He who does not remember Allah when wealthy,
he who does not fear Allah when angry.

From Rage and Revenge to Forgiveness and Favour:

This leads us to the next hallmark of a true Muslim. It has been said that they, if hurt by someone, do not flare up in anger and do not lose their self-control. Going a step further, they do not submit to the dictates of their anger and do not go for a revenge. Not only that, they simply surrender their option of taking revenge and actually forgive the wrong-doer from the depths of their heart. Not stopping at this high enough moral achievement, they rise still higher by doing good to the person who had caused pain to them. This one quality of character seems to be a combination of almost three qualities - to subdue anger, to forgive the offender, and then, being good to him. All these three things have been so eloquently identified in the present verse (134):

وَالْكُظُمِينَ الْغَيْظِ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

... and those who subdue anger and forgive people. And Allah loves those who do good...

While explaining this verse, Imām al-Baihaqī has narrated an amazing episode from the life of Ḥaḍrat 'Alī (Zainul'ābidīn) ibn Sayyidnā Ḥusain رضی اللہ تعالیٰ عنہما. The report says that his maid was

helping him in his *wuḍū* (ablution) when, all of a sudden, the water-pitcher slipped out of her hands spilling water all over Ḥaḍrat 'Alī (Zainul'abidīn) ibn Sayyidnā Ḥusain رضى الله تعالى عنهما. His clothes got wet. In was natural that he would be angry.. The maid sensed the impending danger and lost no time in reciting the following verse of the Qur'an: (...and those who suppress anger and forgive people). Hearing this, the venerated scion of the Prophet's household lost whatever rash of anger he may have felt. He became totally silent. The maid then recited the second sentence of the verse: وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ (And Allah loves those who do good). Since this sentence implicitly instructs people to be good to others and thus be loved by Allah, so Ḥaḍrat 'Alī (Zainul'abidīn) ibn Sayyidnā Ḥusain once he heard it, said: 'All right, go. I give you your freedom.' (Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī with reference to Baihaqī)

Forgiving people their mistakes and short-comings is a quality that ranks very high in human morals. Besides, its merit in the life-to-come is much higher. In *ḥadīth*, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been reported to have said:

"On the Day of Resurrection, a proclamation will go forth from Allah Almighty asking if anyone had any rights due to Him. If so, let him stand. Those who shall rise on that occasion will be the ones who would have forgiven the injustices done to them by people in their life on earth."

In yet another *ḥadīth*, it has been said:

من سره ان يشرف له البنيان وترفع له الدرجت فليعف عن من ظلمه ويعطه من حرمه ويصل من قطعه

"Anyone who likes to have lofty palaces in Paradise and wishes to have his ranks elevated, should forgive the one who has done injustice to him and present gifts to the one who has never given him anything and join up with the one who has severed relations with him."

At another place in the Holy Qur'an, the text is far more clear when it teaches the great moral of doing good to those who do evil and establishes how enemies turn into friends through this noble method. There it was said:

ادْفَعْ بِاللَّيْتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ

Repel evil with what is best, then the one, between whom and you there is enmity, shall become as if he was a fast friend.

(41:34)

This was the supreme measure of the moral training given to His noble Messenger by Allah Almighty. The guideline given to him was:

صِلْ مَنْ قَطَعَكَ وَاعْفُ عَمَّنْ ظَلَمَكَ وَأَحْسِنُ إِلَى مَنْ آسَأَ إِلَيْكَ

Join with him who severs relations with you and forgive him who does injustice to you and do good to him who is bad to you.

The moral grandeur of the Holy Prophet, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, is unique and eminent. We can only think of the blessing of his teachings which so successfully ingrained even in his servants morals and traits of character similar to his own. Being the distinctive feature of a true Islamic society, there are hundreds and thousands of models visible in the lives of the Companions, their successors and among the venerated elders of the Muslim community.

There is an apt incident in the life of the great Imām Abū Ḥanīfah. Someone accosted him in a busy market place and heaped all sorts of insults and invectives on him. The great Imām controlled his anger and said nothing to him. He went home, took out a considerable quantity of gold and silver coins, put them in a gift-wrapped tray and went out to the home of his confronter. He knocked at his door. When this person came out, he presented this tray full of coins before him saying: 'Today, you did something very good to me. You gave me (something) of your good deeds (that you had done). It is in gratitude of this great favour of yours that I am presenting this gift to you.' The Imām's unusual conduct naturally affected the man. He repented and got rid of his bad habit for ever. After asking for Imām's forgiveness, he entered into his circle as a disciple and finally became a great scholar.

Upto this point, the text describes qualities of character that relate to the fulfillment of human rights. Following this, come qualities that relate to the rights of Allah where it has been said that true Muslims do not disobey Allah. Should they ever fall in sin under the compulsions of human weakness, they immediately turn to Allah, repent,

seek His forgiveness and resolve to abstain from that sin in future.

This character of true Muslims appears in the text in the following words:

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا لِذُنُوبِهِمْ
وَمَنْ يَغْفِرِ الذُّنُوبَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَلَمْ يُصِرُّوا عَلَى مَا فَعَلُوا وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ

...and those who, when they happen to commit a shameful act or wrong themselves, remember Allah, then, seek forgiveness for their sins - and who is there to forgive sins except Allah? -- and they do not persist in what they have done, knowingly.

(135)

The verse tells us that involvement in sin is caused by one's negligence in remembering Allah. So, the instruction is: If a sin has been committed, one should immediately turn to Allah, renew the zeal to obey Him and start remembering Him as He should be remembered.

Another point of guidance here tells us that forgiveness of sins depends on two things:

1. To regret past sins, seek pardon for these and to pray for forgiveness.
2. To resolve fully not to go near them in future.

May Allah Almighty bestow upon us the good fortune to become possessed with these supreme morals identified by the Holy Qur'an.
Āmīn.

Verses 139 - 143

وَلَا تَهِنُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَنْتُمْ الْأَعْلَوْنَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٣٩﴾
إِنْ يَمْسَسْكُمْ قَرْحٌ فَقَدْ مَسَّ الْقَوْمَ قَرْحٌ مِثْلُهُ وَتِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ
نُذَوِلْهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ وَلِيَعْلَمَ الَّذِينَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَيَتَّخِذَ مِنْكُمْ
شُهَدَاءَ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿١٤٠﴾ وَلِيَمَحَّصَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ
آمَنُوا وَيَمْحَقَ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿١٤١﴾ أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تَدْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ
وَلَمَّا يَعْلَمِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا مِنْكُمْ وَيَعْلَمَ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٤٢﴾

وَلَقَدْ كُنْتُمْ تَمَنَّوْنَ الْمَوْتَ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تَلْقَوْهُ فَقَدْ رَأَيْتُمُوهُ
وَأَنْتُمْ تَنْظُرُونَ ﴿١٤٣﴾

And do not lose heart and do not grieve, and you are the upper-most if you are believers. [139] If you receive a wound, they have received a similar wound. And such days We rotate among the people, so that Allah may know those who believe and let some of you be martyrs -- and Allah does not like the unjust [140] -- and so that Allah may purify those who believe and eradicate the disbelievers. [141]

Do you think that you shall enter Paradise despite that Allah has not yet known those of you who carry out Jihād nor has He known those who are steadfast. [142] And you had been longing for death before you faced it. Now, you have seen it with your open eyes. [143]

Once again, Muslims are being consoled through these verses about what happened to them at the Battle of Uḥud. They are being told that, under the customary practice of Allah, the disbelievers are the ultimate losers; it does not matter if Muslims have not scored a victory at this time because of their strategic mistake, but should they stick to the demands of their Faith, that is, perseverance and fear of Allah, it will be the disbelievers who shall be the ultimate losers.

Commentary:

The Battle of Uḥud has been fully described earlier in this Sūrah through which we already know that the initial success of the Muslim army turned into a defeat in this *Jihad* because of some of their own shortcomings, although they had already scored an earlier victory (at Badr). Seventy noble Companions sacrificed their lives on this occasion. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was hurt. But, inspite of all this, Allah Almighty let the balance of the Battle tilt in favour of Muslims and the enemy retreated.

This temporary defeat and setback came because:

1. The Muslim archers could not abide by the standing orders given to them by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم due to a difference of opinion. Some favoured holding on to the position they already held;

others saw no need to stay there and opted for the collection of spoils with everybody else.

2. The news that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been martyred on the battlefield weakened their resolve to fight.

3. The difference came up in something very serious, that is, the explicit command of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, the obedience to which was mandatory.

So, these three mistakes by Muslims resulted in a temporary setback. No doubt, this temporary setback was later on turned into final victory for them, yet Muslim *mujāhidīn* were virtually torn apart with wounds. Dead bodies of their most valiant fighters were strewn before their eyes. Even the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was wounded by the merciless enemy. Disappointed, dismayed, they were also terribly shocked over their own mistakes. In short, Muslims were on the horns of a dilemma. They were pining over the past and there was acute danger that they may become weak in the future and the duty of leading the people of the world entrusted to them may be hampered. In order to cover these two gaps, the Holy Qur'an came up with the declaration:

وَلَا تَهِنُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَنْتُمْ الْأَعْلَوْنَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

And do not lose heart and do not grieve, and you are the upper-most if you are believers. (139)

So, the message given to Muslims in the opening verse under comment is: Do not let weakness or inertia come near you in the future and do not pine over what has gone by. Finally, it is you who shall prevail, if you hold on to the path of faith and belief, having total confidence in the promises made by Allah Almighty, never ever turning your backs on obedience to the Prophet and *Jihād* in the way of Allah.

In other words, the object was to impress upon Muslims that they should not waste their time and energy by feeling sorry for whatever mistakes they have made in the past. Instead, they should devote to ways and means which make things right for them in the future. For success after failure, strong faith and an unflinching obedience to the Messenger of Allah are certain guarantees of a bright future. If

Muslims persist with these qualities, they are bound to be victorious ultimately.

This call of the Qur'ān made broken hearts throb again. Sulking bodies were aglow with a fresh spirit. Just imagine how Allah Almighty groomed the men carrying His message and gave Muslims for all times to come a principle and a rule of procedure whereby it was made necessary that Muslims should never shed tears over dead issues. Instead, they should do all they can to get together the means to strength and power. Then, right along with it, it was made very clear that supremacy and glory can be achieved through one, and only one, basic source, which is, having faith and fulfilling its demands. The demands of Faith include among other things, preparations which must be made in view of an impending war. It means that it is necessary to consolidate military power, assemble and make ready all relevant hardware, and harness all other means to that end, of course, in proportion to ability and capacity. The events of the Battle of Uḥud, from the beginning to the end, are a testimony to all these considerations.

The second verse that follows gives consolation to Muslims from another angle. It has been said that if Muslims were wounded or hurt in that particular battle, so also were those fighting against them. If seventy Muslim men were martyred with many wounded, is it not that they had condemned an identical number of their enemies to Hell, and wounded many, a year ago? Then, in this very battle, many a men from the enemy ranks were killed and wounded initially. So, when the text says:

إِنْ يَمْسَسْكُمْ قَرْحٌ فَقَدْ مَسَّ الْقَوْمَ قَرْحٌ مِّثْلُهُ ۚ وَتِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ

If you receive a wound, they have received a similar wound.

And such days we rotate among the people ...

it guides us to another important principle and rule of procedure.

In this mortal world, the customary practice of Allah Almighty is to cause the days of hardship and ease, pain and comfort, suffering and peace occur among people by turns. If, for some reason, a falsely-motivated power succeeds in getting a short-lived upper hand, the group motivated by the truth should not lose heart and come to think

that, from this point onwards, they are always doomed to nothing but defeat. Instead of taking this negative attitude, they should rather go about finding out the causes of that defeat, and once they have discovered those, they should take corrective measures and eliminate all possibilities of repeating those mistakes. In the end, the group motivated by the truth shall emerge as the ultimate victor.

Verses 144 - 145

وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ أَفَإِنْ مَاتَ
أَوْ قُتِلَ انْقَلَبْتُمْ عَلَى أَعْقَابِكُمْ وَمَنْ يَنْقَلِبْ عَلَى عَقْبَيْهِ فَلَنْ
يُضُرَّ اللَّهَ شَيْئًا وَسَيَجْزِي اللَّهُ الشَّاكِرِينَ ﴿١٤٤﴾ وَمَا كَانَ
لِنَفْسٍ أَنْ تَمُوتَ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ كِتَابًا مُؤَجَّلًا وَمَنْ يُرِدْ ثَوَابَ
الدُّنْيَا نُؤْتِهِ مِنْهَا وَمَنْ يُرِدْ ثَوَابَ الْآخِرَةِ نُؤْتِهِ مِنْهَا
وَسَنَجْزِي الشَّاكِرِينَ ﴿١٤٥﴾

And Muḥammad is but a messenger, there have been messengers before him. So, if he dies or is killed, would you turn back on your heels? And whoever turns back on his heels can never harm Allah at all. And Allah shall soon reward the grateful. [144] And it is not the choice of a person to die without the will of Allah, death being a time-bound destiny. And whoever seeks the return in this world, We shall give him out of it, and whoever seeks the return in the Hereafter, We shall give him out of it. And We shall soon reward the grateful. [145]

Commentary

Related to the battle of Uḥud, these verses recount events which have a particular significance of their own for several reasons. As such, the Holy Qur'ān devotes four to five sections of the Sūrah 'Al-Imrān to the sequence of victory and defeat at the battle of Uḥud and to the natural points of guidance underlying these.

In the first verse out of those appearing above, the warning which is rather frightening, given to the noble Companions on an act of indiscretion by some of them, actually settles a matter of principle. A little

deliberation shows that there was a secret behind the temporary debacle suffered by the Muslims, the wounding of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, the spreading of the news that he had passed away and that some Companions lost heart because of it: that secret was nothing but that Muslims should come to understand this basic principle and become practically firm when the challenge comes. This principle of Islam was bipolar. First of all it must be fully realized that Islam gives great importance to the unique respect and love given to the Holy Prophet ﷺ, so much so that it has been made an integral part of Faith and the slightest deviation or weakness in this delicate matter has been equated with straight *kufr*, disbelief or infidelity. Then, at the same time, it was equally important to ensure that Muslims should not fall a prey to the same disease that afflicted the Nazarenes and Christians. They exaggerated the respect and love due to Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام by taking it to the extremes, invested him with partnership in the divinity of Allah Almighty and started to worship him.

When, at the time of the temporary setback suffered by Muslims at the battle of Uhud, someone started the rumour that the Holy Prophet ﷺ had passed away, the agony that seized the noble Companions - a very direct, very natural reaction indeed - is something everybody cannot experience or reckon even in its most modest measure. Only he who has the knowledge of and feeling for the supreme love and devotion the noble Companions had for the prophet could come close to guessing the kind of agony and distress faced by them at that time. It really takes the full knowledge and realization of the sacrifices made by these blessed souls who, out of their unflinching devotion and love for their most dear mentor and the messenger of Allah, staked everything they had - money, property, children and their very lives for his sake, considering their sacrifices as the most desirable achievement of this mortal life, and proving it by their deeds.

Just imagine what would have happened to these devotees of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم when this shocking news came to them, specially so when the battle was in full cry, defeat was looming large after the initial victory, Muslims were losing ground and in this heat of the moment, they come to know the passing away of someone who was the very pivot of their struggle and the symbol of all their hopes.

The natural outcome of this situation was that a large group of the noble Companions started retreating from the battlefield in a state of confusion. This retreat from the battlefield was no doubt a result of fleeting confusion and in the least, without any indication of turning away from Islam. The truth of the matter was that Allah Almighty intended to mould into a group the Companions of His Messenger who were pious and angelic and who could become role models for the whole world. It was for this reason that an ordinary mistake by them was considered to be very serious. Therefore they were addressed on their retreating away from the battlefield in a fashion similar to what it would have been, had they deserted the fold of Islam. With this expressing of wrath, warning was given that all obligations of Faith, Worship and *Jihād* are for Allah who is Living and Eternal. Even if the news that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had been martyred on the battlefield were to be true, that would have been something which was to come to pass when appointed. Losing heart and abandoning the dictates of Faith were responses that did not behove those in their position. Therefore, it was said:

وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ أَفَإِنْ مَاتَ أَوْ قُتِلَ انْقَلَبْتُمْ عَلَى أَعْقَابِكُمْ وَمَنْ يَنْقَلِبْ عَلَى عَقْبِهِ فَنُصِرَ اللَّهُ شَيْئًا وَسَيَجْزِي اللَّهُ الشَّاكِرِينَ

And Muhammad is but a messenger, there have been messengers before him. So, if he dies or is killed, would you turn back on your heels? And whoever turns back on his heels can never harm Allah at all. And Allah shall soon reward the grateful.

Here, Muslims are being warned that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is going to leave this mortal world on one or the other day but they have to hold on to the Faith firmly after him as well, in the same measure as they did during his blessed times. From here, we also come to know that the injury caused to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم during that temporary setback and the news of his passing away on the battlefield was concealed divine arrangement through which all that could happen to the noble Companions after him was revealed during his very life-time so that any slip in their conduct of affairs could be corrected in the very words of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم as a result of which it could be ensured that these ardent lovers and devo-

tees of the Messenger of Allah do not lose their coolness under exacting conditions, specially when this event of the passing away of the Messenger of Allah does actually take place. This is exactly what happened later on when the noble Companions, even the greatest among them, were overwhelmed with the severest emotional shock at the time of his passing away. At this juncture, it was Sayyidnā Abū Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him, who used the authority of Qur'ānic verses such as these to explain the situation to them as a result of which all of them were able to accept the truth and control their emotions.

The need to learn that crucial lesson has been taken up in the second verse as well. In order to teach steadfastness under calamities and hardships, it has been said that the death of every human being lies written with Allah Almighty. Fixed is its date, the day and the time. Death cannot come to take one away before that, nor could one continue to live after that. If so, getting scared about a certain death means nothing.

Now, towards the end, there comes an admonition about one of the apparent causes of this incident. As stated earlier, the Companions who were posted by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم as guards on the hill in the rear saw that fellow Muslims were busy collecting spoils following the initial victory. Some of them started thinking about the fact of victory following which there was no need for them to stay at their post. If so, they concluded, why should they too not go in there and take part in the collection of spoils? So, they moved away from where they were ordered to be. Thereupon, it was said:

وَمَنْ يُرِدْ ثَوَابَ الدُّنْيَا نُؤْتِهِ مِنْهَا وَمَنْ يُرِدْ ثَوَابَ الْآخِرَةِ نُؤْتِهِ مِنْهَا وَسَجَّزَى
الشَّاكِرِينَ

And whoever seeks the return in this world, We shall give him out of it, and whoever seeks the return in the Hereafter, We shall give him out of it. And We shall soon reward the grateful. (145)

Here, it has been hinted that they made a mistake when they abandoned the duty assigned to them by the Holy Prophet ﷺ in order to collect spoils. At this point, let us keep in mind that, in its real

sense, the collection of spoils is not the same as the unabashed pursuit of the material which has been condemned in the Shari'ah of Islam. On the contrary, collecting spoils, depositing it in safe custody and spending it where it must be spent is all a part of *Jihād*, and for that matter, an act of worship. So, the Companions who took part in this mission never did it for sheer material gain, for they would have been entitled to receive their due share in the spoils of war even if they had not actively participated in the collection of spoils as guaranteed under the Islamic Law. Therefore, it cannot be said that these blessed Companions abandoned their post of duty under the temptation of worldly gains. But, as explained earlier under comments on the first verse (144), even minor mistakes made by major people draw more attention. Even an ordinary deviation from their duty is taken to be serious and they are admonished for that. This applies here as well. Granted that their collecting of spoils could be related with the desire to make worldly gains, at the most in some minor way; and equally granted is the possibility that this small connection had not influenced their hearts; yet, it was to take the morals of the noble Companions to the highest possible level that this act of theirs was identified as 'the seeking of return in this world' so that even the tiniest speck of worldly temptation fails to find its way into their hearts.

Verses 146 - 148

وَكَايْنٍ مِّنْ نَّبِيِّ قُتِلَ مَعَهُ رِيسُونَ كَثِيرٌ فَمَا وَهَنُوا لِمَا
 أَصَابَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَمَا ضَعُفُوا وَمَا اسْتَكَانُوا وَاللَّهُ
 يُحِبُّ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٤٦﴾ وَمَا كَانَ قَوْلُهُمْ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا رَبَّنَا
 اغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَإِسْرَافَنَا فِي أَمْرِنَا وَثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَنَا وَانصُرْنَا
 عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿١٤٧﴾ فَآتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ ثَوَابَ الدُّنْيَا وَحُسْنَ
 ثَوَابِ الْآخِرَةِ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٤٨﴾

And there has been a number of prophets along with whom have fought many men of Allah, and they did not lose heart for what they suffered in the way of Allah,

nor did they become weak, nor did they yield. And Allah loves the steadfast. [146] And they had nothing else to say except that they said: 'Our Lord, forgive us our sins and our excesses in our conduct, make firm our feet and help us against the disbelieving people.' [147] So, Allah gave them the return in this world and also the better rewards in the Hereafter. And Allah loves those who do good. [148]

Connected with previous verses where Muslims were admonished for some of their shortcomings during the battle of Uḥud, the present verses cite examples set by men of Allah from earlier communities showing how steadfast they were on the battlefield, something which should be emulated by the present addressees.

The explanation of some words:

1. *Ribbiyūn* (رَبِّيُّونَ): a derivation from *Rabb* (رَبٌّ) like *Rabbānī* (رَبَّانِي) meaning 'of the *Rabb* or Lord' which has been rendered as men of Allah in the present translation. According to *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, here the use of the vowel sound 'i' in place of 'a' is irregular. Some commentators take '*Ribbiyūn*': رَبِّيُّونَ to mean 'many groups'. In their view, this is derived from the word, '*Ribbah*' (رَبَّةٌ) which means 'the group'. Now, as to who is meant here by '*Ribbiyūn*': رَبِّيُّونَ (men of Allah), it has been reported from Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī that this refers to '*ulamā'* (religious scholars) and '*fuqahā'* (juriconsults). (*Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*).

2. '*Istakānū*' (اسْتَكَانُوا) has been derived from '*istakānah*' (اسْتِكَانَةٌ) and means 'to be subdued and rendered weak and immobile' (*Bayḍāwī*).

3. '*Wahanū*' (وَهِنُوا) has been derived from '*wahn*' (وَهْنٌ) and means 'to lose heart under suffering' or 'wilt under pressure.'

Commentary

After citing the example of men of Allah fighting along with previous prophets who remained undeterred and unweakened against heavy odds, the Holy Qur'ān mentions another great quality of the men of Allah who, in spite of their own sacrificing conduct, kept praying to Allah Almighty to:

1. Forgive their past sins,

2. Condone any shortcomings that may have crept in during their present *Jihād* efforts,

3. Enable them to remain steadfast and

4. Make them prevail over enemies.

These prayers carry some important guidelines for Muslims by implication.

Never be proud of a good deed

A true Muslim who knows things as they are is not supposed to wax proud of what he accomplishes by way of a good deed. No matter how great the accomplishment or how exacting the struggle in the way of Allah, he just does not have the right to pat himself on his back, for his very accomplishment of a good deed, in all reality, is the direct outcome of nothing but the grace and mercy of Allah Almighty. In fact, no good deed can even issue forth without it. It appears in a *ḥadīth*:

فوالله لولا الله ما اهتدينا
ولا تصدقنا ولا صلينا

Had it not been for the grace and mercy of Allah, we would have not received guidance in the straight path, nor we would have been able to pay *zakāh* and perform *ṣalāh*.

Seek Forgiveness from Allah under all conditions:

As for a good deed one gets the ability to perform, the truth lies in realizing that it is not within one's control to perform that deed exactly in accordance with the demands of the supreme magnificence of the One who holds the reins of the Creation and Command in His hands. No matter how hard one tries to do things correctly but falling short is inevitable, specially when it comes to doing things as is the due and right of Allah. Therefore, the seeking of forgiveness is also necessary during the very course of such a deed.

Pray for steadfastness and consistency in good deeds:

It is not possible to predict the continuity of a good deed. Who can say for sure that he will be given the ability to go on doing his good deed in the future also just as he is doing it now? All this is a matter of what is known as *Taufīq*, the God-given ability to perform what is good. Therefore, we should repent over any shortcomings in what we are doing in the present and pray that Allah makes us steadfast and

persistent in the future. For a true Muslim, this prayer should become his second nature.

It should be noted that the prayer for the forgiveness of past sins, appearing first, is a subtle hint to the fact that pain caused or defeat suffered in this mortal life is, more than often, a reflection of one's past sins which can be cured through repentance and seeking of forgiveness.

The last verse promises a good reward for the men of Allah in this world as well as in the other. It means that, right here in this mortal world, Allah Almighty gives them ultimate supremacy over the enemies and grants them success in their mission. Then comes the reward in the Hereafter. That reward is certainly the real one, an ideal state of peace and happiness which will never fade out. This factor has been pointed out by the addition of the word *حُسْنُ* : (*husn*: beauty) before 'return in the Hereafter' which makes it read:

وَحُسْنُ ثَوَابِ الْآخِرَةِ

And the better reward in the Hereafter. (148)

Verses 149 - 150

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن تَطِيعُوا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يَرُدُّوكُمْ عَلَى
 أَعْقَابِكُمْ فَتَنْقَلِبُوا خَاسِرِينَ ﴿١٤٩﴾ بَلِ اللَّهُ مَوْلَاكُمْ وَهُوَ خَيْرُ
 النَّاصِرِينَ ﴿١٥٠﴾

O those who believe, if you obey those who disbelieve they will make you turn back on your heels, then you shall turn losers. [149] Instead, Allah is your Lord, and He is the best of all helpers. [150]

When Muslims faced a temporary setback during the battle of Uhud and rumours went around that the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been martyred, the hypocrites found an occasion for mischief under the shadows of a battle nearly lost. They said to Muslims: 'Now, that the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is no more with us, why should we not go back to our old faith and thus get rid of all conflicts between us?' This shows how ugly the conduct of hypocrites was and how avowed an enemy they were to Muslims.

In the verses appearing above, Muslims have been instructed not to listen to such enemies, nor to make them a party to any consultations among themselves, nor follow any advice given by them.

In the previous verses, it will be recalled, the instruction was to follow the men of Allah; here, the instruction is not to act upon the advice of hypocrites and anti-Islam people. Indeed, the instruction is to continue taking guard against them.

The Qur'ānic expression, 'they will make you turn back on your heels', means that the real objective of anti-Islam people is to disengage Muslims from their Faith through engineered suspicion either overtly or covertly, the later method being designed and implemented in a manner which serves to gradually decrease the love and honour of Islam from their hearts resulting in a reversal of their position. Thus, those aiming to push Muslims in a state of loss cannot be their friends, even if they claim to be.

The statement, '...Allah is your Lord and He is the best of helpers' tells Muslims to place their trust in Allah and rely on His help alone. Even if their antagonists come up with plans of help, Muslims should not go by these against the injunctions of Allah and the Messenger.

Verses 151 - 152

سَنُلْقِي فِي قُلُوبِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الرُّعْبَ بِمَا أَشْرَكُوا بِاللَّهِ مَالَهُ
يَنْزِلُ بِهِ سُلْطَانٌ وَ مَا لَهُمُ النَّارُ وَيُسْ مَشْوَى الظَّالِمِينَ
﴿١٥١﴾ وَلَقَدْ صَدَقَكُمُ اللَّهُ وَعْدَهُ إِذْ تَحُسُّوهُم بِآذُنِهِ حَتَّى إِذَا
فَشِلْتُمْ وَتَنَارَعْتُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ وَعَصَيْتُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ مَا أَرَاكُمْ
مَّا تُحِبُّونَ مِنْكُمْ مَّنْ يُرِيدُ الدُّنْيَا وَمِنْكُمْ مَّنْ يُرِيدُ الْآخِرَةَ ثُمَّ
صَرَفَكُم عَنْهُمْ لِيَبْتَلِيَكُمْ وَلَقَدْ عَفَا عَنْكُمْ وَاللَّهُ ذُو فَضْلٍ
عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٥٢﴾

We shall put awe into the hearts of those who disbelieve, since they have associated with Allah something for which He has not sent any authority.

Their ultimate place is the Fire. And evil is the abode of the unjust. [51] And Allah has surely fulfilled His promise to you when you, with His will, were killing them off ¹ until you showed weakness and disputed in the matter and disobeyed after He had shown you what you liked. Among you there were some who were seeking the mundane and among you there were others who were seeking the Hereafter. After that He reversed your position against them, so that He may test you. And, of course, He has forgiven you. And Allah is All-Gracious to the believers. [152]

The previous verses referred to Allah Almighty as 'the best of helpers'; recounted here are some incidents of Allah's help.

The word, *sulṭān*, rendered here as 'authority' includes all revealed or rational bases of their position. The promise of casting awe and fear into the hearts of the disbelievers in this verse was made in the background of the battle of Uḥud when the disbelievers of Arabia marched back to Makkah without any obvious reason and in spite of defeat overtaking Muslims (Bayḍāwī). However, after having covered a certain distance on their way to Makkah, they awoke to their folly. When they thought of marching back to Madīnah, Allah Almighty filled their hearts with such awe and fear that they could not muster the courage to do so. The most they could do was to hire a Madīnah-bound villager to go there and tell Muslims that they were coming back. But, this whole deal came into the knowledge of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in Madīnah through revelation. He marched to Ḥamra' al-Asad to apprehend them but they had already run away from there.

This was the background in which the present verse was revealed.

The verses that follow recount, as pointed out earlier, Allah's help and support for Muslims in the battle of Uḥud.

Commentary:

The High Station of the Noble Companions:

As obvious, the noble Companions made an error of judgement during the battle of Uḥud which forms the subject of admonition and

1. These verses refer to the battle of Uḥud.

correction in the previous continuity of verses. But, equally worth noticing here are the graces of Allah Almighty showered on the noble Companions side by side with the element of warning. To begin with, by saying **يَبْتَكِبُكُمْ** (so that He may test you) it was made clear that this temporary setback did not come as punishment, rather, it was to test them. Then, comes the statement, **وَلَكِنَّا عَافَيْنَاكُمْ**, which very clearly proclaims: 'And, of course, We have forgiven you.'

Did the Noble Companions tilt towards the material?

As stated in the verses, the noble Companions were split in two groups at that time; some sought the mundane while others sought the Hereafter. The question is as to what was done by these revered Companions which identifies them with the seekers of the mundane. Obviously, it was their intention to go and collect spoils which has been equated with the seeking of the mundane. Let us now figure out the reality. If they had held on to their assigned post of duty and, as a result, had not taken part in the collection of spoils, would it have made their due share in the spoil any lesser? And, did their participation entitle them to some larger share? The Law of Spoils as authentically proved by the Qur'an and Hadīth is common knowledge. They, as the first observers of the operation of the Law, knew it beyond doubt that their due share in the spoils was under no condition subject to being more or less. The fact was that their share in the spoils would have remained the same whether they helped in the collection of spoils or remained on guard at the appointed place of duty.

Keeping this in view, it is obvious that their action cannot be classed as the unqualified pursuit of the material. Instead of that, it is participation in what *mujāhidīn* are supposed to do. However, given the workings of human nature, the thought of spoils entering their hearts at that time is not totally unimaginable. But, Allah Almighty has His ways with people; He very much likes to see the hearts of the Companions of His Messenger clean and untouched even by the remotest idea of any tilt towards material possession. So, this very idea of going to possess things of *dunyā* has been equated with 'seeking of the mundane' which explains the element of divine distaste for the action.

Verses 153 - 155

إِذْ تُصْعِدُونَ وَلَا تَلَوْنَ عَلَى أَحَدٍ وَالرَّسُولُ يَدْعُوكُمْ فِي
 أُخْرَاكُمْ فَأَتَابَكُمْ غَمًّا بِغَمٍّ لِّكَيْلًا تَحْزَنُوا عَلَى مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا
 مَا أَصَابَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٥٣﴾ ثُمَّ أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ
 مِّنْ بَعْدِ الْغَمِّ أَمْنَةً نُّعَاسًا يَغْشَى طَائِفَةً مِّنْكُمْ وَطَائِفَةٌ قَدْ
 أَهَمَّتْهُمْ أَنفُسُهُمْ يَظُنُّونَ بِاللَّهِ غَيْرَ الْحَقِّ ظَنَّ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ
 يَقُولُونَ هَلْ لَّنَا مِنَ الْأَمْرِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ قُلْ إِنْ الْأَمْرُ كُلُّهُ لِلَّهِ
 يُخْفُونَ فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ مَا لَا يُبْدُونَ لَكَ يَقُولُونَ لَوْ كَانَ لَنَا مِنَ
 الْأَمْرِ شَيْءٌ مَا قُتِلْنَا هُنَا قُلْ لَّوْ كُنْتُمْ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ لَبَرَزَ
 الَّذِينَ كُتِبَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقَتْلُ إِلَى مَضَاجِعِهِمْ وَلِيَبْتَلِيَ اللَّهُ مَا
 فِي صُدُورِكُمْ وَلِيُمَحِّصَ مَا فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ
 الصُّدُورِ ﴿١٥٤﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَوَلَّوْا مِنكُمْ يَوْمَ الْتَقَى الْجَمْعَانِ
 إِنَّمَا اسْتَزَلَّهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ بِبَعْضِ مَا كَسَبُوا وَلَقَدْ عَفَا اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ
 إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ ﴿١٥٥﴾

When you were going away, not even turning to look at anyone, and the Messenger was calling you from behind you. So, He awarded you sorrow for sorrow, so that you should not grieve (in future) on what you lost, nor on what you suffered. And Allah is All-Aware of what you do. [153]

Then, after the grief, He sent down tranquility upon you - a drowsiness overtaking a group of you. And another group was worrying about their own selves, cherishing thoughts about Allah which were not true - thoughts of ignorance. They were saying, "Is there anything in our hands?" Say, "The whole thing belongs to Allah." They conceal in their hearts what they do not disclose to you. They say, "If we had any say in the matter, we would have not been killed here." Say, "If you were in your homes, those destined to be killed

would have come out all the way to their (final) lying-places." And (all this was done) so that Allah may test your inner qualities and may purify what is in your hearts. And Allah is All-Aware of what lies in the hearts. [154]

Surely, those of you who turned back on the day when the troops faced each other, Satan had but made them slip for some of their deeds. And, of course, Allah has forgiven them. Certainly, Allah is Most-Forgiving, Forbearing. [155]

These verses form part of the several previous verses relating to the battle of Uhud. The first verse here mentions the sorrows of the *ṣaḥābah*, the noble Companions of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. The long succeeding verse describes the antidote. The third verse reiterates that the form of defeat they faced was no punishment. It was a test to separate the true and sincere Muslims from the hypocrites. Finally comes the repeated proclamation that the mistake made by the noble Companions has been forgiven.

Commentary :

In the first verse here, the Holy Qur'ān describes the exit of the Companions from the battlefield, their inability to come back even when called by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in person, the consequent grief that afflicted him because of their conduct and, later on, the incidence of the Companions feeling sorry for the sorrow they brought on their master. According to *ḥadīth* narrations, when Sayyidnā Ka'b ibn Mālīk called out to them, Muslims heard his call and reassembled.

The author of *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī* resolves this by saying that the first call came from the Messenger of Allah himself which could not be heard by the Companions and they kept going the way they were going. That was the time when Sayyidnā Ka'b ibn Mālīk called. Everybody heard him and reassembled.

In *Bayān al-Qur'ān*, Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī has said that the real reason for this confusion was the news that the Holy Prophet ﷺ has fallen a martyr on the battlefield. When he called, there was obviously no refutation of the news with the call. Even if his voice can be

taken to have reached the retreating Companions, the possibility remains that it was not recognized. Finally, when Sayyidnā Ka'b ibn Mālīk called out, his call included a refutation of this news mentioning the fact that the Messenger of Allah was alive. On hearing this, everybody took a sigh of relief and reassembled. As far as the displeasure of Allah and the sorrow of His Messenger are concerned, these can be explained by saying - if they had stayed unagitated and firm, they could have recognized the calling voice.

The Hardships at Uḥud: A Test, not Punishment :

The noble Companions as evident from: **وَلَيَسْتَبْلِيَنَّ اللَّهُ مَا فِي صُدُورِكُمْ** (154), were actually tested through their sufferings at the battle of Uḥud. This was no punishment. The objective was to make true and sincere Muslims distinct from the hypocrites. The mode was a 'test of inner qualities'.

The eloquent Qur'ānic expression **أَنَابَكُمْ غَمًّا** (He awarded you sorrow), which is suggestive of punishment, can be resolved by saying that the outward form was, no doubt, that of punishment but the real purpose was a sort of affectionate correction, something similar to a well-meaning reprimand from a father to his son or a teacher to his student. In common usage, this can be called a punishment of some sort, but this is, in all reality, a form of training and correction. This is very different from a pure legal punishment.

Why did Muslims suffer at Uḥud ?

The last part of verse 154 beginning with **لَيَسْتَبْلِيَنَّ** (so that Allah may test) seems to indicate that the cause of hardships faced by Muslims was this wise divine arrangement. But, the statement: **إِنَّمَا اسْتَزَلَّهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ** **بَعْضُ مَا كَسَبُوا** in the verse (155) following immediately seems to suggest that some past mistake of theirs is the cause of this Satanic effect.

The answer is that the particular past mistake was the obvious reason which gave Satan the incentive to make them slip once again, an effort in which the Satan incidentally succeeded. But there was much more to it; there were wise arrangements made by the Creator behind this slip and its outcome. These have been covered under the expression **لَيَسْتَبْلِيَنَّ** : 'so that Allah may test'. In *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, a report from Zaijāj says that the Satan made them recall some of their sins in the presence of which they hesitated to appear before their Lord. So they moved away from *Jihād* hoping to fight later on following

personal correction and thus meet Allah as martyrs in *Jihād*.

One sin becomes the Cause of another:

From the last verse we discover that one sin drags in yet another sin, very much like one good deed which pulls in another good deed. In other words, all deeds - good and bad - have a sort of magnetic pull of their own. When a person accomplishes a good deed, experience shows that other good deeds become easy on him. His very heart starts desiring to do what is good and righteous. Similarly, a person who commits a sin finds that it has cleared the way for other sins. His very heart starts desiring to do what is sinful. Therefore, some elders say: ان 'the ready reward of a good deed is another good deed which a person is enabled to accomplish and the ready punishment of an evil deed is another evil deed the way to which has been cleared by the first.'

In Masā'ilus-Sulūk, Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī has said: 'As explained in *ḥadīth*, sin makes the heart dark and when the heart goes dark, Satan prevails.'

The position of the Noble Companions in the sight of Allah Almighty :

As briefly stated earlier, the mistakes made by some noble Companions at the battle of Uhūd were intrinsically serious. The majority from among the fifty Companions who were commanded by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم to guard a hill-top strategic point, with clear instruction not to leave their duty-post, no matter what happens at the battle front underneath, moved away from their assigned place. Granted that the reason for their abandonment of the post of duty was an erroneous independent judgement, as they thought their side had won the battle. The order to guard their post, according to their view, had been carried out, therefore, they thought, they could go down and join in with the rest of Muslims. But, in reality, their action was in clear contravention of definite instructions given by the Holy Prophet ﷺ. This mistake of theirs motivated them to leave the battlefield, no matter how this is explained, as reported earlier from Zajjāj. Moreover, this retreat from the battlefield took place while the Messenger of Allah was with them unmoved from the front line and calling them back from behind them. If this situation is viewed without reference to

personalities and circumstances that action would certainly be classed as a very serious breach of conduct in a military encounter. In fact, of the many blames imputed to various Companions under the unfortunate genre of *Mushājarāt* (the mutual quarrels and armed confrontations between the noble Companions which took place after the Holy Prophet ﷺ) this would be rated as the most serious.

But, something more worthy of consideration is what Allah Almighty has done in their case inspite of all their mistakes. Stated right here in the present verses, is how their grief was physically changed into tranquility through drowsiness. Then, they were told that their suffering was no punishment; it was a matter of test. Then came the clearly worded proclamation of forgiveness for them. It will be recalled that these have appeared earlier, yet they have been reaffirmed here. There is an element of wisdom behind this repetition. The first time it was said, the purpose was to comfort the noble Companions themselves. Incidentally, here is a refutation of what the hypocrites said to Muslims. They chided them for not acting on their advice, as a result of which they (the Muslims) suffered all those hardships.

In short, all these related verses make it very clear that the Companions of the Messenger of Allah hold a unique position of affection in His sight inspite of such serious mistakes made by them. Not only that they have been pardoned and forgiven but actually they have been blessed with much more. They have been made special recipients of Allah's grace and mercy. This is what comes from Allah Almighty Himself through the authentic words of the Holy Qur'ān. A similar case, as reported in *ḥadīth*, relating to Sayyidnā Ḥaṭīb ibn Abī Biltā'ah was brought before the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. He had written a letter to the *mushrikīn* (disbelievers) of Makkah in which he had passed on information about Muslims living in Madīnah. When the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was told about it through a revelation, the letter was intercepted. The noble Companions were very angry with Sayyidnā Ḥaṭīb ibn Abī Biltā'ah for what he had done. Sayyidnā 'Umar, may Allah be pleased with both of them, asked for permission to behead that 'hypocrite'. But, the Holy Prophet ﷺ knew that Ḥaṭīb was no hypocrite; he was a true, sincere Muslim but he had made a

mistake inadvertently. So, he forgave him his mistake and declared that he was one of the people (veterans) of Badr and, perhaps, Allah Almighty has enforced general pardon for all participants of Badr. (This narration appears in all authentic books of *aḥādīth*).

The Noble Companions: Lesson for Muslims :

It is based on this affirmation that the followers of Sunnah and Jamā'ah (*ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*: Muslims who adhere to the practice of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and that of his blessed Companions رضى الله عنهم اجمعين) find the confirmation of their belief and practice. That is, even though the noble Companions are not above sin, for sins can be and have been committed by them, but despite this, it is not permissible for the Muslim community to ascribe any evil or defect to them in a derogatory manner. When Almighty and His Messenger ﷺ forgave such serious slips and errors coming from them and dealt with them generously and mercifully and gave them the great station of رضوانه عليهم : 'may Allah be pleased with them and may they be pleased with Allah,' how can anyone claim to have the right to talk about anyone of them in a derogatory manner ?

This is why Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar رضى الله عنه , on hearing somebody satirize Sayyidnā 'Uthmān al-Ghanī and some noble Companions by saying that they had run away from the battlefield, the reference being to this incidence at Uhūd, said, 'Nobody has the right to criticize that which Allah has expressly proclaimed to have been forgiven (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī).

Therefore, all doctrinal source-books of the *ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* unanimously agree that it is *wājib* or necessary to honour the position of the noble Companions and to abstain from criticizing, mocking or speaking ill of them. It appears in al-'Aqā'id an-Nasfiyah:

ويكف عن ذكر الصحابة الا بخير

It is necessary that one should not talk about the Companions except in a good manner.

In Sharh al-Musāmarah, Ibn Humām has said:

اعتقاد اهل السنة تزكية جميع الصحابة والثناء عليهم

The belief of the followers of the Sunnah is that all Companions

ions were purified and that they be remembered with praise.

This is what appears in Sharḥ Muwaqif:

يجب تعظيم الصحابة كلهم والكف عن القبح فيهم

It is obligatory to honour the Companions, all of them; and avoiding satire or criticism against them is equally mandatory.

Abridged below is what Ḥafīz Ibn Taymiyyah has said in al-'Aqidatul Wasīṭiyah:

"It is a cardinal belief of *Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah* that Muslims must refrain from accusing or criticizing any Companion of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in the matter of disagreements or armed conflicts which may have come up among them. There is a reason for this. Most of the narrations imputing drawbacks in them which have crept into history are a pack of lies planted by enemies. They simply have no truth in them. Then, there are others in which the reality has been reversed by additions and alterations. Even if, there was some truth about something, that has to be taken as the independent judgement of the Companions in which they have no choice. Going a step further, we can assume a situation where they may not be helpless but be capable of using their choice, then, what works there is the Divine Law إِنَّ الْحَسَنَاتِ يُذْهِبْنَ السَّيِّئَاتِ that is, good deeds make up for the bad ones. And it is more than obvious that nobody can claim equality with them in the matter of good deeds. The good they did cannot be matched by the good done by anybody else. Similarly, nobody else can be more deserving of the mercy and forgiveness of Allah Almighty as compared to them. Therefore, nobody has the right to sit on judgement against them and call their deeds to account and in that process, criticise or speak ill of them."

Verses 156 - 158

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَقَالُوا لِإِخْوَانِهِمْ
إِذَا ضَرَبُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ أَوْ كَانُوا غُرًى لَوْ كَانُوا عِنْدَنَا مَا مَاتُوا

وَمَا قُتِلُوا لِيَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ ذَلِكَ حَسْرَةً فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ يُحْيِي
وَيُمِيتُ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿١٥٦﴾ وَلَئِنْ قُتِلْتُمْ فِي
سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَوْ مُتُّمْ لَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرَحْمَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِمَّا يَجْمَعُونَ
﴿١٥٧﴾ وَلَئِنْ مُتُّمْ أَوْ قُتِلْتُمْ لَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُحْشَرُونَ ﴿١٥٨﴾

O those who believe, do not be like those who disbelieve and say about their brethren while they travel on the earth or are involved in fighting, "Had they been with us, they would have not died nor would they have been killed." The result is that Allah makes it a remorse resting in their hearts. And Allah gives life and brings death. And of what you do, Allah is watchful. [156]

And if you are killed in the way of Allah or die, the forgiveness from Allah, and mercy, is far better than what they accumulate. [157] And if you die or get killed, it is towards Allah that you shall be gathered. [158]

The saying of the hypocrites in verse 156 here is an extension of what was cited in verse 154 earlier : "لَوْ كُنَّا كُنَّا مِنَ الْآخِرِ شَيْءٌ مِمَّا قُتِلْنَا هُنَا" : "If we had any say in the matter, we would have not been killed here." Since there were chances that sincere Muslims may be affected by such doubt-creating devices used by hypocrites, Muslims were asked through these verses to remain unconcerned with such sayings and doings and adhere to the belief that the span of life and the time of death are ordained by Allah alone.

Verse 159

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ
لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ
فِي الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ
الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ ﴿١٥٩﴾

So, it is through mercy from Allah that you are gentle to them. Had you been rough and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you. So, pardon them and seek Forgiveness for them. And consult them

in the matter, and once you have taken a decision, place your trust in Allah. Surely, Allah loves those who place their trust in Him. [159]

Even though, the mistake made by Muslims and the abandonment of the battle front by them had caused grief to the Holy Prophet ﷺ, he did not reproach them for this because of his high morals and his natural way of forgiving and forgetting. He did not even deal with them sternly as may have been in order. But, Allah Almighty willed to see that the Companions of His Messenger are comforted and the sense of shock and shame they had for their mistake is washed away. So, in this verse, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is being asked to deal with them more gently and affectionately and consult with them in matters of concern.

Commentary:

The traits of a patron

The Companions of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم loved him far beyond the concerns of their own lives and belongings. When they made a mistake acting against his express instructions, there were two dangers. Firstly, it could further increase their sense of shock and affect their normal emotional-rational response. They could even lose hope of mercy, especially when they realized what mistake they had made and how disobedient they had been to the command of their leader. This danger was already eliminated in the previous verse where 'We awarded you sorrow for sorrow' means that the return of this mistake has already been given right here in this mortal world and the account in the Hereafter lies clean.

Secondly, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was hurt as a result of this mistake, physically. The spiritual discomfort was already there. It was likely that these two factors may contribute to making the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم unhappy with his Companions which, in turn, may become a hinderance in his mission to teach and train them. In order to counter this likelihood, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was asked to forgo their mistake, forgive their shortcoming from the depth of his heart and deal with them gently and affectionately in the future as well.

The subject has been taken up with unusual delicacy of style in the

Holy Qur'an which, as a corollary, covers some important points of guidance.

1. The diction used to convey the related command to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is eloquently suggestive of his personal praise, as well as that of his unique human majesty, that is, he has these attributes in him already built in.

2. The addition of *فِيكَ رَحْمَةً* (So, it was through mercy from Allah) before the statement is there to affirm that the presence of such attributes of perfection in his person is but through Divine mercy. This is no personal perfection in its own right. Then, by placing the word, '*rahmah*' (mercy) in an indefinite form, hint has been made towards the great and extensive spread of Allah's mercy which, in turn, makes it very obvious that this mercy is not restricted to the noble Companions only, but extends in full to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم himself for Allah has made him identified with such perfect attributes.

3. The third point made here establishes that the presence of the qualities of gentle manners, good morals, forgiveness and generosity in him serve a purpose. Had these been not there in him, the mission of educating human beings with which he is charged would have never been accomplished as desired. Rather than seek to correct and raise the level of their morals in his company, people would have run away from him.

The Etiquette of *Da'wah*:

By combining elements cited above, there emerges a set of distinct qualities necessary for preaching, no matter what form it takes. Anyone who embarks on the mission of inviting people to Allah, explaining His guidance and calling people towards the right conduct in their best interest, must first inculcate these qualities in him. The reason is obvious. When a possible 'rough' or 'hard-hearted' approach, even if it happens to come from the very dear Messenger of Allah Almighty, has not been considered fit, who else can dare to gather people created by Allah around him with hostility and negative morals and still hope to seek a change in their behaviour.

In this verse, Allah Almighty has said: 'Had you been rough and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you.' This indi-

cates that harshness, in conduct or language, is sheer poison for a *da'wah* worker or a leader conveying Allah's message to people. This is a sure way to undo what one intends to achieve.

Then, the verse says: *فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ* 'So, pardon them'. This indicates that a *da'wah* worker or reformer of people should never punish them for their mistakes. Instead, he should forgive and forgo. It is important that he does not get excited or angry when his listeners speak ill of him. The truth is that he should rise higher and treat his tormentors with compassion and leniency.

Soon, after that, the verse says: *وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ* 'And seek forgiveness for them'. This seeking of forgiveness for them from Allah Almighty points out to an unusual rule of behaviour. Not only that he should remain patient in what is painful, the Messenger is being asked not to forget seeking their good with utmost sincerity. The best that can be wished for them is their salvation in the life-to-come, the good that waits for them in *Ākhirah*. So, the Messenger is being asked to pray for their forgiveness in order that Allah spares them from His punishment.

Finally, it has been said: *وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ* 'And consult them in the matter' which means that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is to seek their advice in matters of concern so that they are fully satisfied and emotionally at peace, as the Messenger of Allah, by following this instruction, will be giving an external form to his intention of doing what is good for them. Thus, the act of his asking them to sit in consultations with him will become an act of mollifying grace.

After having asked the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم to consult with his Companions, the verse concludes with the instruction on final decision-making. As regards consultation, the Holy Qur'ān has given clear injunctions at two places. The first one appears right here in the verse under commentation while the second one appears in a verse of Sūrah al-Shūrā (42:38) where one of the qualities of true Muslims has been identified as *وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ* (Every matter of theirs is settled by mutual consultation). There are places where the instruction to consult appears secondarily, for instance, under injunctions relating to suckling in Sūrah al-Baqarah (2:233) where it is said: *عَنْ تَرَاضٍ مِّنْهُمَا وَتَشَاوُرٍ* (Now, if they want to wean, by mutual consent, and consultation, there is no sin on them). The matter of consultation involves some important

problems and rulings, therefore, it needs to be explained in some detail which follows.

1. The Meaning of **أَمْرٌ** : Matter and **شُورَى** : Consultation.

The word *amr* is applied for several shades of meaning in the Arabic language. In common usage, it refers to any saying or doing which is of great importance. It is also used to mean an injunction, order, command, rule or authority, the last one being what is meant in the Qur'anic expression **أُولَى الْأَمْرِ** (*uli l'amr*). Then, the word is also applied to mean a particular attribute of Allah Almighty which finds mention in several verses of the Holy Qur'an, such as: **أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ** (Beware, for Him alone is the creation and the command - 7:54) **إِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُ الْأَمْرُ كُلُّهُ** (To Him the whole matter shall be returned - 11:123), **إِنَّ الْأَمْرَ كُلَّهُ لِلَّهِ** (The whole thing belongs to Allah - 3:154); **أَمْرُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ** (His matter is upto Allah - 2:275) and according to authentic scholars, the use of the word, *amr*, in **قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي** (Say: 'The spirit is by a command of my Lord') (17:85) carries the same meaning as identified in the verses appearing immediately above.

As far as the meaning of the word, *amr*, in the Qur'anic verses **وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ** (And consult them in the matter - 3:159) and **وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ** (And a matter of theirs is (settled) by a consultation between themselves - 42:38) is concerned, it can be said that there is the possibility to assign both the first as well as the second. If it is said that the word has been used here in the first sense while the second meaning is inclusive therein, that would not be something far-fetched since affairs relating to command and authority are all very important. Therefore, the word, *amr* as used in the verses quoted immediately above means every matter or affair which is particularly important irrespective of whether it belongs to the area of authority or mutual dealings.

The Arabic words, *shūrā* (counsel), *mashwarah* (consultation) and *Mushāwarat* (mutual consultation) mean the soliciting of advice and counsel in something that needs deliberation. Therefore, the expression **وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ** in the present verse means that the Holy Prophet ﷺ has been commanded here to consult with or seek the advice of his noble Companions in matters that need deliberation, which include those of authority and government.

Similarly, the verse from Sūrah al-Shūrā cited above - وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَىٰ بَيْنَهُمْ - means that in every important matter (which) needs deliberation, whether it belongs to the field of authority and government or to something important other than these, the customary practice of true Muslims is that they work through mutual consultation.

2. The Status of Consultation in Islamic Law

From the statements of the Holy Qur'ān cited above and from related *aḥādīth* of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, it becomes clear that mutual consultation in a matter likely to have more than one opinion, whether it be related to the concerns of authority or to an issue other than that, is a *sunnah* of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and the noble Companions رضى الله عنهم and is a source of blessings in the mortal world and in the eternal life of the Hereafter. This view has the support of the Holy Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth. As far as matters which relate to people, such as the affairs of authority and government, are concerned seeking consultation in them is obligatory. (Ibn Kathīr)

In his *Shu'bul-Īmān*, al-Baihaqi has reported from Sayyidna 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar رضى الله عنه that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said: 'A person who intends to do something, then goes in consultation and comes up with a decision to do or not to do that, he gets from Allah Almighty guidance towards an option which is correct and beneficial.'

It appears in *aḥādīth*: 'When your rulers are from the best among you and your rich people are generous and your affairs are decided through mutual consultation, then, to live on the surface of the earth is better for you. And should your rulers be the worst among you and your rich people be close-fisted and your affairs be entrusted to women, then, to be buried under the earth shall be better than your continuing to live.'

It means that, when the worship of desires overpowers you, so much so that you, ignoring all concerns of the good and the bad, the harmful and the beneficial, simply to seek the goodwill of a woman, entrust your affairs in her hands, then, for you, death is better than living through those times. Otherwise, seeking the opinion of a woman as well while making consultations is no taboo, and certainly not prohibited. This is proved by the consistent practice of the Holy

Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and his blessed Companions. In the verse from Sūrah al-Baqarah (2:233) cited a little earlier, the Holy Qur'ān has said: 'Now, if they want to wean, by mutual consent, and consultation, there is no sin on them.' Since this matter here concerns the woman, therefore, consultation with the woman has been specially made binding on the man.

In a *ḥadīth*, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been reported to have said: *المستشار مؤتمن إذا استشير فليشره بما هو صانع لنفسه*: 'The person whose counsel is sought is a trustee. When he counsels, then, he must counsel with what he would propose to his ownself (to do otherwise is a breach of trust)'. This *ḥadīth* has been reported with good authority from Sayyidnā 'Alī by al-Ṭabarānī in al-Mu'jam al-Awsaṭ (see al-Maẓharī).

At this point, it is necessary to bear in mind that consultation is an act of Sunnah only in situations where some clear and categorical injunction from the Qur'ān or *Ḥadīth* does not exist. Otherwise, in the presence of a clear and categorical injunction of the Shari'ah, no consultation with anybody is needed. This is not permissible either. For example, if somebody went about consulting in - 'should I make my *ṣalāh* or should I not?' 'Should I pay my *zakāh* or should I not?' or 'Should I perform my Ḥajj or should I not?' - then, this would be absurd. These are not things you consult about. They are absolutely mandatory under the Shari'ah of Islam. However, the option of making consultation about how to go for Ḥajj is open and one can seek advice on questions like - should he go this year, or next; should he go by sea, or by air; should he go by land, or by some other method.

The same holds true about *zakāh*. One can consult about where and on whom it has to be spent, for the Shari'ah has left these on the choice of the payer.

In a *ḥadīth*, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been reported to have explained this himself. Sayyidnā 'Alī رضي الله عنه says that he asked the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم : 'If, after you, we are confronted by a situation the injunction for which has not been explicitly revealed in the Qur'ān, and about which we have heard nothing from you as well, what are we supposed to do?' The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: 'For a matter like this, get together from among you pious men who are consistently devoted to the worship of their Lord and who have deep

and extensive understanding of the Faith (*fuqahā*) and decide the matter following their mutual counsel. Do not decide on the basis of someone's solitary opinion.'

The first, out of the two things that we learn from this *ḥadīth* is that consultation is not restricted to worldly affairs. Instead, the fact is that mutual consultation in situations where clear *nuṣūṣ* (plural of *naṣṣ* meaning textual authority) from the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth in matters governed by the injunctions of Shari'ah do not exist is an act of Sunnah. We can say that mutual consultation will be an act of Sunnah if made in situations where textual authority from the Qur'ān and Sunnah is not available. The second rule we learn is that advice should be taken from people who are known for their understanding of the Faith and devotion to their obligations to Allah (Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī) Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, to whom the deduction given above is credited, has reported another *ḥadīth* from Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah رضى الله عنه which says: استرشدوا العاقل ولا تعصروا فتندموا (Seek counsel from the wise person and do not act against it, otherwise you will regret.).

By putting the above two *aḥādīth* together, we learn that two qualities are necessary for the members of the consultative council. Firstly, they should be wise, perceptive and advice-worthy, and secondly, they should be pious and devoted to *'ibādah*. In other words, they should be deserving of giving advice and should be God-fearing in their conduct. If the matter to be discussed involves problems relating to Islamic Law, it is incumbent that they be *faqīh* (juriconsult: expert in Islamic Law and Jurisprudence) as well.

Consultation of the Holy Prophet ﷺ with his Companions

The verse under discussion here orders the Holy Prophet ﷺ to consult his Companions رضى الله عنهم. This raises a certain difficulty here. Isn't it that he is the Messenger of Allah and the blessed recipient of revelation? Why, then, should he need to consult anyone? Since, everything can come to his knowledge through the medium of revelation from Allah Almighty, some scholars interpret this command to consult by saying that the Messenger of Allah was neither in need to be counselled, nor anything he did depended on such counsel. The command to consult given to him is simply to honour the blessed Companions and mollify their broken hearts. But, Imām Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ does not

agree with this view. According to him this is not correct, for being involved in consultation - while knowing that one's counsel will not be acted upon, nor would it affect any proceedings of the agenda - will make the whole thing ineffectual. If so, no heart will be mollified and no honour will be sustained. Instead, the truth of the matter is that a course of action to be taken by the Messenger of Allah is identified through revelation directly by Allah Almighty. This holds good in all general matters. But, there are certain matters which, under the dictates of the wisdom and mercy of Allah Almighty, are left to the opinion and discretion of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. It is in such matters alone where consultation is needed, and these are the kind of matters in which he has been commanded to seek consultation. The history of the consultative sittings of the Messenger of Allah confirms this view.

When the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم consulted with the Companions about the battle of Badr, they said that should he ask them to jump into a river, they would do just that; and if he commanded them to march to a far out place such as Bark al-Ghamad, they will be with him; and they would never act like the companions of Mūsā عليه السلام who said: 'Go, you and your Lord, and fight the disbelievers' - 5:24; on the contrary, we shall fondly submit: 'You lead the way, we shall fight the enemy with you, in front of you and in the rear and the right and the left.'

Similarly, he consulted them about the battle of Uḥud asking them if they should defend Madīnah by staying inside the city limits or should they go out of the city limits and confront the enemy in the open. The general opinion of the Companions was that they should do the latter and this was what he accepted to do. In the battle of Khandaq, the question of accepting peace under the terms of a particular treaty came up for discussion. Sayyidnā Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh and Sa'd ibn 'Ubadah رضى الله عنهم opposed the proposed treaty on the grounds that it was inappropriate. It was the opinion of these two Companions that he finally accepted. When he went into consultations on a matter pertaining to Hudaybiyyah, the opinion of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه was the basis of his final decision. The Companions were also consulted following the incident of Ifk (false imputation against Sayy-

idah 'Ā'ishah (رضى الله عنها) but this and all other matters pointed out were those in which no particular position to be taken by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was determined through revelation.

To sum up, being a prophet, a messenger and a receipient of revelation is not a bar against consultation. Moreover, in the case of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم it cannot be said that his seeking of counsel from the Companions was ever designed to please them artificially, or that it was virtually ineffectual in the conduct of affairs. On the contrary, the truth is that there were many occasions when he accepted the opinion of those present during consultation even if it happened to be against his own. In fact, in some situations where a particular line of action had not been determined for the Holy Prophet ﷺ through revelation, and in its absence he had worked through consultation, there is great divine wisdom. The objective is that the practice of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم comes to be established for all future generations of Muslims. Thus, the seeking of consultation as a Sunnah shall become binding on the whole *ummah* of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. Imagine when he himself has not been left free of the need of consultation who else can claim to be free of such need? For this reason, the method of mutual consultation always continued to be operative during the blessed times of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and his noble Companions رضى الله عنهم particularly in matters where there was no clear injunction in the Qur'ān and Sunnah. When the Holy Prophet ﷺ passed away from this mortal world, the noble Companions continued following his practice. Still later, mutual consultation was resorted to as the modality to deduce rulings of Islamic Law in matters where clear injunction was not found in the Qur'ān and Sunnah. This was actually the method taught by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in answer to a question put by Sayyidnā 'Alī رضى الله عنه .

4. The Status of Consultation in an Islamic State:

As stated earlier, the Holy Qur'ān has given clear instructions about *mashwarah* or consultation at two places. One appears right here in the verse under study; the other one comes up in verse 42:38 of Sūrah al-Shūrā where one of the many qualities of true Muslims has been mentioned as وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ which means that their affairs are settled by mutual consultation. At both these places the word, *amr*

(matter) has been mentioned along with *mashwarah* (consultation). Discussed in detail earlier, the word, *amr*, signifies any important saying or doing, while at the same time, it is applied to injunction, rule or authority or government. No matter which of the two meanings is taken, consultation in the affairs of the government emerges as invariably necessary, based on these verses. If one elects to take this to mean the affairs of the government, then, the necessity is all the more obvious. In case, the word is taken in its general sense, the affairs of a government being important and far-reaching in effect, would still be considered as affairs in which consultation will be inevitable. Therefore, it is one of the duties of the Muslim *Amīr*, the chief executive of the community, that he should seek the counsel of those responsible for the affairs of the government in matters that are important. The verses of the Qur'ān quoted above and the consistent practice of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, and of the rightly-guided Caliphs is a clear proof of this requirement.

These two verses not only highlight the need for consultation very clearly, they also point out to some basic principles of Islam's system of government, and its constitution. The Islamic government is a government by consultation in which the *amīr* or chief executive is chosen by consultation and definitely not as a matter of family inheritance. It is a *barakah* of Islamic teachings that this principle is recognized all over the world, in one or the other form, so much so that hereditary monarchies too are moving towards this arrangement, willingly or unwillingly.

But, let us go back 1400 years in history when the super-powers were Cyrus and Ceaser. The common factor between them was that they both headed hereditary empires and the authority of government was vested in their own persons. Thus, one man ruled millions, not on the basis of ability or capacity, but on the strength of the cruel principle of hereditary possession of sovereignty. This form of government, an insult to all human beings, was the way all over the world except Greece where the early teachings of a democratic order of life had yet to translate into principles that would go on to establish a stable government. Instead of that, these ideas relegated into a branch of Aristotelian philosophy. As opposed to this, Islam demolished the

unnatural principle of government through heredity and gave the choice of appointing and dismissing the chief executive to the people - a power they could use through their representatives shouldering the responsibilities of the affairs of the state. The world, once stuck in the quagmire of traditional monarchy, came to know about this natural and just system through Islamic teachings and this happens to be the spirit of a system of government we now know as democracy.

But, modern democracies, since they appeared as a reaction to cruel monarchies, came out with an equal lack of moderation. They went on to give the masses the sense of being the absolute, the ultimate entity, an unbridled sovereign of the system of government and the law of state, to the extent that their minds and hearts became alienated from the very concept of God, the Creator of the earth and the heavens and of all human beings, not to say much about the concept of His real Sovereignty and Rule, which comes as a result of that cardinal belief. Now the situation has reached a stage where their 'democracy' has started taking the restrictions imposed by Allah Almighty on public choice - which in itself was conferred on human beings by Him - as something of a burden, contrary to justice and equity (of their brand).

The way Islamic Law liberated the whole world from Cyruses, Ceasars and other despotic monarchies, it has also shown the way of God to western democracies trying to hide from Him behind secular curtains. Islam's way is no more a secret. Its teachings clearly say that the rulers and the ruled, the governments and their peoples are all subject to the Law given by Allah Almighty. The masses, their representative assemblies, law-making, appointment and removal of office-holders must operate within the parameters set by Allah Almighty. It is their duty to see that full consideration is given to ability and merit, in the choice of the chief executive, holders of offices and responsible positions. In addition to that, their honesty and trustworthiness should be weighed and tested. When it comes to selecting the chief executive of their government, they must select the one who is the best of all in knowledge, fear of Allah, honesty, trustworthiness, ability and political experience. Even this chief executive, elected though he may be, is not totally free, unchecked and despotic. He has to seek counsel

from those who are capable of giving such counsel. The Holy Qur'ān bears witness to this and so does the constant practice of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and of the great rightly-guided Caliphs, may Allah be pleased with them all. Who else can claim to be more just than them?

Sayyidnā 'Umar رضى الله عنه has said:

لَا خِلَافَةَ إِلَّا عَنْ مَشُورَةٍ

There is no *Khilāfah* (Caliphate) unless it be with consultation. (Kanzul-'ummāl vide Ibn Abī Shaybah)

Government by consultation is a basic Islamic requirement so much so that a chief executive or head of the state, if he ever unfetters himself from the need for consultation or takes counsel from those who are not fit to give counsel from the point of view of the Shari'ah of Islam, has to be removed of necessity.

ذكر ابن عطية أن الشورى من قواعد الشريعة وعزائم الاحكام ومن لا يستشير اهل العلم والدين فعزله واجب، هذا مالا خلاف له (البحر المحيط لابى حيان)

It appears in al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ of Abī Hayyān: Ibn 'Atiyyah رحمه الله said that Consultation is one of the basic principles of Islamic Law and Faith. He who does not consult with those who know must be removed as a matter of obligation. This is what nobody differs about.

By making consultation mandatory, the blessings that would benefit the Islamic state and its citizens could be measured by what the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said about consultation. Ibn 'Adī and al-Baihaqī have reported from Sayyidnā ibn 'Abbās رضى الله تعالى عنه that when this verse was revealed, the Holy Prophet ﷺ said: 'Allah and His Messenger do not need this consultation, but Allah Almighty has certainly made it a source of mercy for my community' (Bayān al-Qur'ān).

The purport is, if Allah Almighty had so willed, He would have conveyed everything to His Messenger through revelation. It was within His power not to leave any need for consultation in anything. But, it was in the best interest of the Muslim community that Allah Almighty helped establish the practice of consultation through His

Messenger. This is why many matters were left without any mention and about which no particular revelation was sent down. About these, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was instructed to seek consultation.

5. Consultation: Decision-Making after a difference of opinion:

What happens when opinions differ on a certain matter? Would it be decided on the contemporary parliamentary principle? Would the chief executive be compelled to enforce the decision of the majority? Or, would he have the right to take a course of action on the basis of powerful arguments and obvious welfare of the state, coming from any side, no matter whether in a majority or a minority? From the Holy Qur'ān and Ḥadīth and from the constant practice of the noble Prophet ﷺ and his Companions, it cannot be proved that the *amīr* of Muslims, their head of the state is helplessly bound by the decision of the majority. On the contrary, some hints from the Qur'ān and clarifications from the Ḥadīth and the practice of the Companions make it very evident that the *Amīr* can, in the event of a difference of opinion, use his discretion and go by any of the several courses of action, irrespective of the fact that it comes from the majority or the minority. There is no doubt that the *Amīr* will do his best to look into other opinions as well to satisfy himself fully, but should the majority come to agree on one opinion, this could, at times, become a source of satisfaction to him.

A close look at this verse would show that the Holy Prophet ﷺ, after he has been commanded to seek counsel, is being told: **فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ** : '...and once you have taken a decision, place your trust in Allah'. Here, the word, '*azm*' in '*azamta*' meaning a firm decision, one way or the other, has been ascribed to the Holy Prophet ﷺ. The text does not say, '*azamtum*', a second person plural, which would have suggested the participation of the Companions in the final making and enforcing of the decision. This hint proves that, once the process of consultation has been completed, the decision and its enforcement is the valid prerogative of the chief executive. There were times when Sayyidnā 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb would give his decision based on the opinion of Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, if his opinion was weightier argument-wise, something done even when present there would be Companions more senior than Sayyidnā ibn 'Abbās in age, learning

and seniority. There were many occasions when the Holy Prophet ﷺ has preferred the opinions of the revered *Shaykhayn* Abu-Bakr and 'Umar رضى الله عنها against the majority of other Companions to the limit that people thought this verse was revealed for consultation with these two only. Hākim reports from Sayyidnā ibn 'Abbās in his Mustadrak:

عن ابن عباس فى قوله تعالى (وشاورهم فى الامر) قال ابوبكر و عمر
(رضى الله عنهما) (ابن كثير)

Ibn 'Abbās says, that the pronoun in '*shāwirhum*' (consult them) refers to Abū Bakr and 'Umar رضى الله عنهما. (Ibn Kathīr)

The narration of Kalbi is clearer than this:

عن ابن عباس قال نزلت فى ابى بكر و عمر و كانا حوارى رسول الله ﷺ
و وزيريه و ابوى المسلمين

Ibn 'Abbās says that this verse has been revealed for consulting with Abū Bakr and 'Umar. These two were special Companions of the Messenger of Allah and his Ministers and the patrons of Muslims. (Ibn Kathīr)

The Messenger of Allah, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, had once addressed Sayyidnā Abū Bakr and 'Umar رضى الله عنهما in the following words:

لواجتمعتما فى مشورة ما خلفتكما ط

When you agree on an opinion, I do not decide against you.
(Ibn Kathīr with reference to the Musnad of Aḥmad)

A doubt and its answer:

It is not likely that someone objects to this procedure of decision-making saying that all this is against democracy, a model of one-man rule and that this system might hurt the rights of the masses.

The answer is that the Islamic system of government has already taken care of this problem, for it has not given the masses the absolute right to make anyone they wish the *amīr* of an Islamic state. On the contrary, the mandate given to them requires that they must select a person they think is the best of all in knowledge, conduct, functional ability, Godliness and honesty, and then elect him to be the *amīr*. Now a person who has been elected in view of such elegant qualities and attributes should certainly not be subjected to restrictions usually

placed on the dishonest, the sinful and the debauch. Doing this would be against reason and justice, an act of discouragement to the genuine servant of people and a hinderance in the promotion of community-oriented action.

6. Do what you can, then place your trust in Allah:

At this point, specially at the conclusion of the verse, it is very important to bear in mind that this instruction has been given after having prescribed consultation in all important affairs including those of government. The crucial guideline given here is: Even after having made all preparations, when you finally decide to go ahead and do what has to be done, then that is the time when you do not simply (place your) trust in your reason, opinion, plans or preparedness but, instead of that, you should place your trust in Allah alone, for all these considered plans are in the direct control of the supreme Planner of all affairs and matters. With this in view, the less is said about human beings and their plans is better. Man himself is witness to the futility of his plans in the thousands of events in his life-time.

The statement, 'And once you have taken a decision, place your trust in Allah' also clarifies that placing one's trust in Allah does not mean that the efforts to provide means and make plans should be abandoned. The fact is that placing one's trust in Allah while leaving off means near at hand is contrary to the blessed practice of prophets, and against the teachings of the Holy Qur'ān. However, if one sits idle dreaming about distant means and irrelevant concerns, or if one relies solely on means and plans as effective agents and ignores the Prime Causer of means and the Planner-par-Excellence of all affairs and plans, then this would certainly be against *tawakkul*, the placing of trust in Allah.

Verses 160 - 171

إِنْ يَنْصُرْكُمُ اللَّهُ فَلَا غَالِبَ لَكُمْ وَإِنْ يَخْذُلْكُمْ فَمَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَنْصُرْكُم مِّنْ بَعْدِهِ وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٦٠﴾ وَمَا كَانَ لِنَبِيٍّ أَنْ يَغُلَّ وَمَنْ يَغْلُلْ يَأْتِ بِمَا غَلَّ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ ثُمَّ تُوَفَّى كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿١٦١﴾ أَفَمَنْ

اتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَ اللَّهِ كَمَنْ بَاءَ بِسَخَطٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَمَا لَهُ جَهَنَّمُ
 وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٦٢﴾ هُمْ ذَرَجَتْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ بِصِيرٍ بِمَا
 يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٦٣﴾ لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ
 رَسُولًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ
 الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿١٦٤﴾
 أَوْ لَمَّا أَصَابَتْكُمْ مُّصِيبَةٌ قَدْ أَصَبْتُمْ مِثْلَيْهَا قُلْتُمْ أَنَّى هَذَا
 قُلْ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ
 ﴿١٦٥﴾ وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ يَوْمَ التَّقَى الْجَمْعُ فَبَاذِنِ اللَّهَ وَلِيَعْلَمِ
 الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٦٦﴾ وَلِيَعْلَمِ الَّذِينَ نَافَقُوا وَقِيلَ لَهُمْ تَعَالَوْا
 قَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَوْ ادْفَعُوا قَالُوا لَوْ نَعْلَمُ قِتَالًا
 لَا تَبْعُنَكُمُ هُمْ لِلْكَفْرِ يَوْمَئِذٍ أَقْرَبُ مِنْهُمْ لِلْإِيمَانِ يَقُولُونَ
 بِأَفْوَهِهِمْ مَا لَيْسَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَكْتُمُونَ
 ﴿١٦٧﴾ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا لِإِخْوَانِهِمْ وَقَعَدُوا لَوْ أَطَاعُونَا مَا قَاتَلُوا
 قُلْ فَادْرَءُوا عَنْ أَنْفُسِكُمُ الْمَوْتَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿١٦٨﴾
 وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا بَلْ أَحْيَاءُ
 عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ ﴿١٦٩﴾ فَرِحِينَ بِمَا آتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ
 وَيَسْتَبْشِرُونَ بِالَّذِينَ لَمْ يَلْحَقُوا بِهِمْ مِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ أَلَّا خَوْفٌ
 عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿١٧٠﴾ يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ بِنِعْمَةِ مِنَ اللَّهِ
 وَفَضْلٍ ۚ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٧١﴾

If Allah helps you, there is none to overcome you. And if He abandons you, then, who is there who could help you after that? And in Allah the believers should place their trust. [160]

And it is not (conceivable) for a prophet to misappro-

priate the spoils. And whoever misappropriates, shall bring forth, on Doomsday, what he misappropriated. Then, everybody shall be paid, in full, what he has earned. And they shall not be wronged. [161]

How then, could one who submits to the pleasure of Allah be equal to him who returns with displeasure from Allah? And his ultimate place is the Fire. And what an evil end it is. [162]

They are of various ranks with Allah. And Allah is watchful of what they do. [163]

And Allah has surely conferred favour on the believers when He raised in their midst a messenger from among themselves who recites to them His verses and makes them pure and teaches them the Book and the Wisdom, while earlier, they were in open error. [164]

And how is it that, when you suffered a hardship the twice of which you had inflicted upon them, you say, "Where did this come from?" Say, "This is from your own selves. Allah is surely Powerful over everything." [165]

And whatever you suffered on the day when the two troops faced each other was with the will of Allah and in order to know the believers [166] and in order to know those who are hypocrites. And it was said to them, 'Come on, fight in the way of Allah, or defend.' They said, "Had we known it to be a fight we would have certainly followed you." That day, they were nearer to disbelief than they were to Belief. They utter from their mouths what is not in their hearts. And Allah is the most-knowing of what they conceal. [167]

Those who said about their brethren, while themselves sitting, "Had they obeyed us, they would have not been killed." Say, "Then repel death from yourselves if you are true." [168]

And never take those killed in the way of Allah as dead. Rather, they are alive, with their Lord, well-provided, [169] happy with what Allah has given them of His grace; and they feel pleased with the good news, about those who, after them, could not join them, that there shall be no fear for them nor shall they grieve. [170]

They feel pleased with blessing from Allah, and grace, and with the fact that Allah would not let the reward of the believers be lost. [171]

In the first verse (160) here, the recurring sense of grief that gripped the noble Companions after what happened at the battle of Uhud is being removed through elegant counsel.

Verses 161-164 declare that the station of Allah's messenger is free of failings, that he exhibits the highest standard of trustworthiness, and that the very presence of his on the face of the earth is a great blessing and a favour shown to the people of the world.

Verses 165-167 explain the reason why Muslims faced hardships at Uhud, while refuting the view of the hypocrites alongwith it in verse 168.

Towards the end, in verses 169-171, it has been said that those who lay down their lives in the way of Allah achieve the ultimate success, real, permanent and full. Details follow.

Commentary:

The verse مَا كَانَ لِنَبِيِّ أَنْ يَغْلُ translated as, 'And it is not (conceivable) for a prophet to misappropriate the spoils - 161', has a particular background of its revelation. As a corollary, the problem of '*Ghulūl*', that is, misappropriation in the spoils, comes into focus.

Misappropriation in the spoils: A sin which cannot be ascribed to any prophet by any stretch of imagination:

The background, as narrated by al-Tirmidhī, is that a sheet was found missing from the spoils collected in the battle of Badr. Some people said that the sheet may have been, perhaps, taken by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. If those who said that were hypocrites, the source speaks for itself. May be, this came from a less-initiated Muslim thinking that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had the right to do that. Thereupon, this verse was revealed which said that *ghulūl* is a great sin to be punished severely on Doomsday and that the very thought of linking this sin to a prophet is an ugly audacity, for prophets are free of all sins (معصوم : *ma'sūm*).

The word, *ghulūl* is also used in the absolute sense for *khiyānah*, a breach of trust, (misappropriation, pilferage and stealing). This is also

applied particularly to misappropriation in the spoils as the crime of stealing from the spoils is far more serious as compared to common thefts and filchings since spoils belong to the whole Muslim army as a matter of right. So, whoever steals from it steals from hundreds and thousands of people. Even if there comes the thought of making amends at some later stage, it would be very difficult to give back to everyone what was due to be given, or seek their forgiveness for the injustice done. This is contrary to other types of thefts where the owner of the stolen property is known. In this case, there is the chance that one may repent, if Allah gives the ability to do so, and that which was stolen could be returned back to the owner, or one could, at the least, exonerate himself from the blame by seeking forgiveness from him. This is illustrated by what happened at one of the battles fought by Muslims. Someone who had secretly withheld a portion of wool from the spoils thought about it after the distribution of the spoils was over. He brought it before the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم hoping to return it. But he, inspite of being 'mercy for the worlds' and far more generous to his community than fathers and mothers could ever dream to be for their children, he returned it back to him saying: How can I distribute it over the whole army now? Now it is you who would present yourself with it on the Day of Doom.

Therefore, the punishment for *ghulūl* or misappropriation is more severe as compared to common thefts. What else could be more severe for the misappropriator when he, before the eyes of the whole creation on the plains of resurrection and retribution, will find himself disgraced with what he had stolen all stacked on his neck? A narration from Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah appearing in Al-Bukhārī and Muslim reports that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: 'Watch out, lest I see one of you with a camel loaded round his neck (and the announcement being made that this person had stolen a camel from the spoils). If this person asks me to intercede on his behalf, I shall tell him frankly that I had conveyed what Allah had commanded, now I cannot do anything about it.'

May Allah protect us from this disgrace of the Day we rise again which, according to some narrations, will be so hard on those who face it that they would wish to be sent to the fires of *Jahannam* in lieu of this terrible disgrace.

Misappropriation in *Waqf* properties and government Treasuries comes under *Ghulūl*: غلول

The same rule applies to mosques, religious schools and institutions, *khanqāhs* and properties of *awqāf* (endowments) since they represent the contribution of millions of Muslims. If an unfortunate misappropriator was to go about seeking to be forgiven for his evil act, how could he possibly go to each one of those millions. The same rule holds good for public or government treasury (*Bayt al-Māl*) because all citizens of a country have a right in it. One who steals from it steals from everyone. But, the problem is that these very holdings are such that a single owner does not sit over them. The caretakers become negligent. Avenues of pilferage abound. It is in such moneys and properties that a lot of thefts and misappropriations have become rampant all over the world with most people heedless to the evil end that awaits them. They do not realize that this is a terrible burden to haul onto the plains of Resurrection, not to speak of the punishment of Hell that is bound to come as a result of this crime. Then, last but not the least, comes the sad deprivation from the promised intercession of the Messenger of Allah. Let us all seek refuge from such a fate !

The Prophet of Islam: a great blessing for the Humanity

Verse 164 speaks of the great favour Allah has shown to the Muslims by sending the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم towards them. The basic functions assigned to him are also mentioned in the same verse. These are the same functions which were attributed to him in the prayer of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام as referred to by the Holy Qurʾān in Sūrah al-Baqarah. The details of these functions have already been discussed in the first volume of this book under the said verse (2:129).

What is new in the present verse is the statement: 'And Allah has surely conferred favour on the believers'. Two points about this statement are worth mentioning here:

(1) The words 'on the believers' in this verse apparently mean that the advent of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was a favour conferred on the Muslims only while at another place the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been held as *رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ*: 'the Mercy for all the worlds' which includes both Muslims and non-Muslims. In order to resolve this apparent contradiction one must understand that the particularization of this

quality with 'believers' in the present verse is very much like saying that the Holy Qur'ān is 'guidance for the God-fearing' (هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ) while the fact that the Holy Qur'ān is a guidance for the whole humanity is clearly proved by other verses of the Qur'ān. However, there are places where this universal status of the Qur'ān has been particularized to the God-fearing. There is a common reason operating at both places, that is, the beneficial coming of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is a great blessing and a great favour for the Muslim and the non-Muslim alike, just as the Qur'ān is a Book of Guidance for the entire humanity. but the true Muslims and the God-fearing are the only ones who derived the fullest benefit out of these. At some places, therefore, the blessing and the guidance, were particularized with them.

(2) In order to explain the primary statement in the verse which declares that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is the greatest possible blessing and favour for the believers or for the whole humanity, it can be said that the statement hardly needed any explanation. only if modern man was not all that blind to the spiritual side of life and, at the same time, was sacrificing every good thing for the sake of naked material gains. Had this not been so, every reasonable person would have found out the reality of this great blessing all by himself without anybody having to tell him about it. But, the problem is that modern man has turned out to be no more than the smartest animal among the animals of the world. Tell him about 'favour' and 'blessing' and he would immediately start seeing what fills his stomach and whets his desires. He has practically stopped thinking about the basic reality of his being which is *rūḥ*, his spirit. That something good should happen to it and that something can go wrong with it are concerns he pays no heed to, not in the least. Therefore, there is the need to explain that man is not simply a being of bones and flesh. That is certainly not his reality. The reality of man is his *rūḥ*, the spirit which is contained within him. So far as this *rūḥ* is there in his body, man is what man is. His claims to humanity stand proved. He may be weak or he may be dying, nobody can dare usurp his property or take his rights away from him. But, once this *rūḥ* leaves his body, he ceases to be man, no matter how strong and well-built he may be with all parts of his body in their ideal form and shape. His ceasing to be what he was means that he now has no personal right in his own property and possessions.

Prophets come into the world to nurture the human spirit correctly, to make human beings out of men so that actions which issue forth from their bodies turn out to be beneficial to humanity and that they do not go about the world hurting other human beings like beasts and snakes. Instead of that, they should also think about their end and start working for the everlasting life of the Hereafter. Our blessed Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم who leads the way among the great company of prophets عليهم السلام has a unique majesty when it comes to the mission of making men real human beings. This was exactly what he did during his Makkan life. The men he turned out formed a society of human beings which stands way ahead of even the angels. Never had the earth, nor the heavens, seen such men, each one of them, a living miracle of the Messenger of Allah, may the blessings of Allah be upon him. What happens after them? The answer is that he left behind his own footprints, and theirs, as well as teachings and the methods to institute and promote, which can be followed and acted upon. Those who do so sincerely and honestly can still reach the stations that were reached by the noble Companions. These teachings are there for the entire humanity to benefit from. Therefore, his having graced this world and his being born generous is a great favour shown to the universal kingdom of human beings, though true Muslims are the ones who have reaped the fullest benefit from these blessings.

The Wisdom behind the hardships of the Muslims at Uḥud

The subject of verse 165, **أَوَلَمْ أَصَابَكُمْ** translated as, 'And how is it that, when you suffered a hardship the twice of which you had inflicted upon them...' has appeared in several previous verses. Here, it comes for the sake of emphasis and further clarification because Muslims were very much disturbed as a result of this incident, so much so that some of them could not resist wondering why should they be suffering in that manner (أَتَىٰ هَٰذَا) while they were in the company of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, doing *Jihād*.

In this verse, Muslims are being reminded that the hardship they were facing that day was only half of what they had already inflicted earlier at the battle of Badr, for seventy Muslims were martyred at Uḥud while seventy disbelievers were killed at Badr and seventy

others from them were taken prisoners by Muslims. The purpose behind this reminder is that Muslims should think positively in their present state of depression in view of the fact that they had already won a battle, inflicting a loss on the enemy twice as much as they had themselves suffered at their hands. Now, a winner-like this need not surrender to sorrow and grief in the event defeat comes once, or less.

Secondly, and primarily too, the purpose of saying, *قُلْ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ أَنْفُسِكُمْ*, 'This is from your own selves' at the end of this verse, is to tell Muslims that the hardship they have faced is not because the enemy is stronger or his forces overwhelming, but all that has been caused by some of their own shortcomings, that is, they fell short in obeying the command of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم.

Immediately later, in verse 166, the words *fa bi idhnillāhi*: *فَبِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ* indicate that whatever happened there was with the leave and will of Allah Almighty operating behind which are many wise divine arrangements, some of them having been explained earlier. One such wise arrangement is that Allah will 'see' His true believers, and the hypocrites too, that is, the sincerity of Muslims and the hypocrisy of the hypocrites will become so clear that everybody could see it for himself. Here, the reference to Allah's knowing or seeing means seeing in the perspective of our own sense-experience in the mortal world. Otherwise, as far as Allah is concerned, He knows and sees everything, all the time. So, the wise arrangement became all the more clear when, at the time of the trial, the hypocrites bowed out of the harm's way while true Muslims stood undaunted in the middle of the battle front. Incidentally, there is another cause of comfort here in the martyrdom of Muslims in the battle, for Allah has conferred such rewards on them so that others should envy them. So, very appropriately, in: *وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ يَبْغُونَ* *وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ يَبْغُونَ*, *فَقُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ*, the special merits of martyrs have been taken up in the verse that follows (169).

The special merits and ranks of those who sacrifice their lives in the way of Allah

In addition to this statement of the Holy Qur'ān, the merits of the martyrs have been taken up in great detail in sound *aḥādīth*. According to Imām Al-Qurṭubī, the *shuhadā'* (martyrs) have different ranks and states of being which should be taken into consideration

while looking at descriptions in *Hadīth* narrations.

The very first distinction of martyrs mentioned here is that they have not died; rather, they have begun to live eternally. At this point, it is worth noticing that their death and burial in a grave is something physically witnessed and realized by many, yet the Qur'ān has, in several verses, clearly instructed that they should not be addressed or taken as dead. What does this mean? If this was supposed to be an interim state of life, after death and before resurrection, referred to as the state of *Barzakh* in Islamic terminology, that would not take us very far, for that is something commonly experienced by believers and disbelievers both, when the spirit continues to live after physical death and goes through a question-answer situation following which the true and the righteous among Muslims are welcomed to comfort and the disbelievers and the sinners are consigned to the punishment of the grave. This is proved by the Qur'ān and Sunnah. Now, that the interim life of *Barzakh* is established as common to all, what is so special about *shuhadā'* (martyrs) ?

The answer is given by this very verse where it is said that the *shuhadā'*, i.e., those killed in the way of Allah, are blessed with provisions of Paradise from Him, and it is obvious that '*rizq*' (provision or sustenance) is needed by and given to the living. From here we know that sustenance starts reaching the *shahīd* (martyr) immediately after the *shahīd* leaves the frame of his life in the mortal world. In this manner, the *shahīd* enters into a special type of life right away from that point of time, something which has a status distinct from that of 'the dead' of our common experience (Qurtubī).

There are no easy answers to questions such as - what is that distinct status and what is the nature of that life? The only answer is that its reality remains unknown to all except to the Creator of the universe; nobody has the power to know what is it - nor is there, for that matter, any need to know. Nevertheless, there are times when the effect of their special life does show up on their bodies buried in this world, that is, the earth they rest in does not eat them up but leaves them good and intact (Qurtubī). There have been many incidents where this phenomena has been physically witnessed.

So, in summation, their first merit as pointed out in this verse is

their distinct perennial life; the second is their being well-provided from Allah and the third (فَرِحْنَ بِآئَاتِهِمُ اللَّيْلُ) is that they shall always be happy with Allah's blessings and grace. The fourth (وَسَتَسِيرُونَ بِالَّذِينَ كُفُّوا أَعْيُنُهُمْ) merit is the good news given to them about their relatives and circle of friends they left behind in the mortal world that they too shall deserve the same blessings and ranks with their Lord if they remain good in deeds and are active in *Jihād* (170-171).

Al-Suddī says that a *shahīd* is informed beforehand when one of his close friend or relative is about to die. The news that a certain person was coming to them makes them as happy as one would usually be when an old friend, long separated by time and distance, comes to meet him.

The background of the revelation of this verse as narrated by Abū Dawūd on sound authorities from Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās is as follows. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said to the noble Companions: 'When your brothers-in-faith fell martyrs at the battle of Uhud, Allah Almighty placed their spirits in the bodies of green birds and set them free. They get their sustenance from the streams and fruit-trees of the Paradise following which they return to special candelabrams held suspending for them underneath the 'throne' ('*arsh*) of the All-Merciful. When they noticed the luxury of their life there, they said, 'Can anyone tell them (their grieving friends and relatives in the world) about how we live here so that they stop grieving about us and go about striving in *Jihād* as we did.' Allah Almighty said, 'We shall let them know about this state of yours.' Thereupon, this verse was revealed (Qurṭubī).

Verses 172 - 175

الَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِلَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا أَصَابَهُمُ الْقَرْحُ
لِلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا مِنْهُمْ وَاتَّقُوا أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٧٢﴾ الَّذِينَ قَالَ
لَهُمُ النَّاسُ إِنَّ النَّاسَ قَدْ جَمَعُوا لَكُمْ فَاخْشَوْهُمْ فَزَادَهُمْ
إِيمَانًا ۖ وَقَالُوا حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ ﴿١٧٣﴾ فَانْقَلَبُوا
بِنِعْمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَفَضْلٍ لَمْ يَمْسَسْهُمْ سُوءٌ ۖ وَاتَّبَعُوا رِضْوَانَ

اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ ذُو فَضْلٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١٧٤﴾ إِنَّمَا ذَلِكُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ يُخَوِّفُ
أَوْلِيَاءَهُ ۚ فَلَا تَخَافُوهُمْ وَخَافُوا إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٧٥﴾

Those who responded to the call of Allah and the Messenger, even after they had received the wound, for those of them who did good and feared Allah there is a great reward [172] -- those to whom people said, "The people have gathered against you; so, fear them." It increased them in Faith and they said, "Allah is all-sufficient for us, and the best one to trust in." [173]

So, they returned with bounty from Allah, and grace, with no evil having even touched them -- and submitted to the pleasure of Allah. And Allah is the Lord of great bounty. [174]

It is none but that Satan who frightens (you) of his friends. So, do not fear them. And fear Me if you are believers. [175]

Commentary :

The subject of the previous verse was the battle of Uhud connected with which is the battle of Ḥamrā' al-Asad which forms the subject of the present verse. Ḥamrā' al-Asad is a place eight miles away from Madīnah.

The background of this event, mentioned briefly under introductory remarks about verse 151, is that the disbelievers of Makkah left the battlefield of Uhud, reached a certain distance where they realized that they had made a mistake by retreating. Since they had almost won the battle, they should have gone for the final assault and finished off the Muslim forces. The thought so gripped them that they started getting ready to march back to Madīnah. But, Allah Almighty cast such awe and fear in their hearts that they found it more convenient to march back home to Makkah. They still left a message with a passing group of travellers to Madīnah asking them to give a warning to Muslims that they were coming back after them with all their awesome strength. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم found this out through a revelation and he reached Ḥamrā' al-Asad in hot pursuit (Ibn Jarīr, cited by Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī).

It appears in Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī that, on the second day of Uhud, the

Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم made an announcement before his *mujāhidīn* that they have to pursue the disbelievers but the attacking company will be composed of those who were active participants in yesterday's battle. Two hundred *mujāhidīn* rose following this announcement.

A report in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī states that seventy people stood up following the announcement by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم as to who was ready to go after the disbelievers. Among those were people who had been severely wounded in the battle a day earlier, some even had to be helped in walking. This blessed company marched to apprehend the disbelievers. When they reached Ḥamrā' al-Asad, they met Nu'aym ibn Mas'ūd who told them that Abū Sufyān has assembled together a much larger force once again and he is all set to invade Madīnah and eliminate its people. Injury-ridden and much weakened Companions heard this disturbing news yet it was in one voice that they said: 'We do not know him': *حَدَّثَنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ* (Allah is sufficient for us and He is the best caretaker.)

On the one hand there was this news broken to Muslims so they get terrorized, but nothing of this sort happened to them. On the other hand, there was the instance of Ma'bad al-Khuzā'ī, a man from the tribe of Banī Khuzā'ah. He was on his way to Makkah. Though not a Muslim, he was a well-wisher of Muslims - his tribe was an ally of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. So, when he saw Abū Sufyān repenting his retreat from Madīnah and all too resolved to go back and fight, he told Abū Sufyān: 'You are making a mistake by thinking that Muslim forces have become weak. I have just passed by a huge army of theirs camped at Ḥamrā' al-Asad. Armed with an array of men and materials, they are about to set out in hot pursuit against you.' This report from him put the awe of Muslim forces in his heart.

This event has been related in three verses (172-174) given above. It has been said in the first verse (172) that despite injuries and hardships from the Battle of Uhud, when Allah and His Messenger called them up for another *Jihād*, they were ready for that too. Worth noticing at this point is the fact that the Muslims being praised here had two distinguishing features. The first one appears in *مِنْ أَبْعَدِ مَا آصَابَهُمُ الْقَرْحُ* (even after they had received the wound) which means that those

who responded to the call of Allah and His Messenger were people wounded at the Battle of Badr. Seventy of their brave companions had met their martyrdom on the battlefield while they themselves were riddled with injuries all over their bodies, yet when they were called to serve again, they immediately agreed to join the *Jihād*.

The second distinctive feature has been mentioned in the words: **لِلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا مِنْهُمْ وَاتَّقُوا** (for them who did good and feared Allah) which established that these people were not simply some great achievers on the battlefield striving incessantly and staking their lives for a noble cause, but they also imbibed in their person the highest virtues of *Ihsān* (righteous conduct) and *Taqwā* (fear of Allah). Thus, this very blessed combination of virtues is the cause of their great reward.

Removing a doubt

Let there be no doubt about the word: **مِنْهُمْ** (literally 'of them') used here. It should not be taken to mean that all these people were not armed with the virtues of *Ihsān* and *Taqwā* - only some of them were. The simple reason is that the preposition **مِنْ** : *min* (of, some of) used here is not divisive or partitive. It is, rather, doubtlessly narrative which is confirmed by the very opening words of this very verse: **الَّذِينَ** **اتَّبَعُوا** (Those who responded to the call). From this, it is clear that such response and submission simply cannot materialize without having the qualities of *Ihsān* and *Taqwā* ingrained in one's personality. That is why most commentators have declared that the preposition **مِنْ** : *min* (of, some of) has been used here in the narrative sense. In short, the essential meaning of the verse is that all these people had rewards waiting for them.

Striving to achieve something good even at the cost of one's life is not enough unless there is total sincerity behind it

Anyway, this particular mode of address leads us to an essential rule of conduct which is: No matter how good is an effort made and no matter how many sacrifices of wealth and life one makes to achieve that end, it can be reward-worthy in the sight of Allah only when it is simultaneously backed by *Ihsān* and *Taqwā*. Therefore, the essence of the observation is that the deed undertaken must be for the good pleasure of Allah alone. Otherwise simple feats of bravery, some of which come even at the cost of one's dear life, are just about no lesser

among disbelievers as well.

In its ultimate reality, the command of the Messenger of Allah is the command of Allah.

In this event, it will be recalled that the command to pursue the disbelievers was given by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. This does not find mention in any verse of the Holy Qur'ān. But, in this particular verse, when the obedience of those people is praised, the command was attributed to both Allah and His Messenger as evident from the words of the text: الَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِلَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ (172): 'Those who responded to the call of Allah and the Messenger. This proves very clearly that the command which the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم gives is also the command of Allah even though it has not been mentioned in the Book of Allah.

As for those irreligious deviants who reject *Hadīth* and belittle the status of the Messenger of Allah by restricting it to that of a courier (God forbid), a simple statement, that Allah Almighty has openly declared the command of the Messenger as His own, should be enough to understand the truth - if understanding is what they seek. This statement, moreover, also makes it clear that the Messenger can, also by himself and at his discretion, set up rules in accordance with expedient considerations, and all such rules have the same status as that enjoyed by the commandments of Allah.

The Definition of *Ihsān*

Mentioned several times during the comments given above, the word *Ihsān* generally means the performance of good deeds with the best of effort and discretion. However, the basic definition of *Ihsān* was given by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم himself as reported in the well-known '*hadīth* of Jibra'īl'. The actual words are:

أَنْ تَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ كَأَنَّكَ تَرَاهُ فَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ تَرَاهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَرَاكَ

That is, worship Allah as if you are seeing Him; and if it is not possible for you to (imagine that you) see Him, then, (imagine that) He sees you anyway.

The Definition of *Taqwā*

The word, *Taqwā*, has been interpreted variously but the most comprehensive definition is what was given by the blessed Companion 'Ubayy ibn Ka'b رضى الله عنه when Sayyidnā 'Umar رضى الله عنه asked him as

to what *Taqwā* really was. Sayyidnā Ubayy ibn Ka'b said: 'O Commander of the Faithful, you may have certainly passed by pathways full of thorns, have you not?' Sayyidnā 'Umar رضى الله عنه said, 'Several times, of course.' Sayyidnā Ubayy ibn Ka'b رضى الله عنه asked, 'What did you do at that time?' Sayyidnā 'Umar رضى الله عنه said, 'I folded the hang of my dress and walked carefully.' Sayyidnā Ubayy ibn Ka'b said, 'Enough. You said it. This is what *Taqwā* means. This mortal world of ours is a bed of thorns, full of the thorns of sins, therefore, one should live in this world in a way that one does not get entangled in the thorns of sin. The name of this attitude to life is *Taqwā*, the highest capital gain one can dream of.' The blessed Companion, Sayyidnā Abū al-Dardā' رضى الله عنه used to recite the following verse quite often:

يَقُولُ الْمَرْءُ فَإِنِّدْبَنِي وَمَالِي ، وَتَقْوَى اللَّهِ أَفْضَلُ مَا اسْتَفَادَا

"People say, 'my gain' and 'my money' while, really, the fear of Allah (*Taqwā*) is the best of what is gained."

In the second verse (173), more praises have been showered on the noble Companions, may Allah be pleased with them all, who so courageously stepped forward to join this *Jihād*. The words of the verse are:

الَّذِينَ قَالَ لَهُمُ النَّاسُ إِنَّ النَّاسَ قَدْ جَمَعُوا لَكُمْ فَاخْشَوْهُمْ ، فَزَادَهُمْ إِيمَانًا

--- those to whom people said, "The people have gathered against you; so, fear them." It increased them in Faith ...

That is, blessed are such people who heard the news that the enemy has assembled a big fighting force against them and also the advice that they should fear them and avoid fighting - still, this news further increased the fervour of their faith. The reason is simple: When these blessed people had agreed to obey Allah and His Messenger, they had realized right from day one that the path they have chosen to travel on is full of dangers. There will be difficulties and impediments at every step. Their passage will not be easy. They will be stopped. Even armed efforts will be made to suppress their revolutionary movement. Thus, when these noble people came across such hardships, the power of their Faith increased to levels higher than before and, as a result, they worked harder, more selflessly, more than ever.

As obvious, the Faith of these noble souls was perfect from the very first day they had embraced Islam, therefore, the reference to the increase in Faith in these two verses (172-173) means the increase in the qualitative contents and end-results of Faith. Even this state of the Companions who readily responded to the call of Allah and His Messenger has been specially mentioned at this point by saying that they kept reciting: *حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ* (173) all along their march to the *Jihād* mission. The sentence means: Allah is all-sufficient for us and the best one to trust in.

Let us consider an important rule of conduct at this point. It is a fact and we know it too well that no one in this world can claim to have placed his trust in Allah, a degree more pronounced than the Holy Prophet *صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم* and his noble Companions. But, the form and manner of such trust was different. He would never think of sitting back forsaking all physical means available and end up saying: Allah is all-sufficient for us - He will bless us with victory while we sit out and do nothing! No. This did not work like that. Instead, he gathered the noble Companions together, infused a new fighting spirit in the hearts of those injured, prepared them for the *Jihād*, both materially and spiritually before marching out. It means that he collected and used all physical means which were available to him and it was only after that he said: 'Allah is all-sufficient for us.' This, then, is the most authentic form of *Tawakkul* (Trust in Allah) taught by the Holy Qur'an, personally practiced by the Holy Prophet *صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم* and this was what he made others around him do. All physical means which we have in the life of this world are blessings from Allah. Rejecting or abandoning them amounts to being ungrateful to Him. Placing trust in Allah after having forsaken available physical means is no Sunnah (established practice) of the Messenger of Allah *صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم*. However, if there be someone comprehensively overwhelmed by his state of being, he could be deemed as excusable while being unable to observe this precept of the Shari'ah. Otherwise, the most sound practice is no more than what has been curtly expressed in a Persian poetic line:

برتوکل زانوی اشتربہ بند

Before placing trust, do tie your camel.

The Holy Prophet *صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم* has himself stated the meaning of

this very verse: حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ (173) 'Allah is all-sufficient for us, and the best one to trust in,' while deciding a case reported in *Hadīth* :

As reported by Sayyidnā 'Awf ibn Mālīk رضى الله عنه , a case involving two men came up for hearing before the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم . He gave his verdict. The man who lost the case heard the verdict in perfect peace and started walking out with the words: حَسْبِيَ اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ (Allah is all-sufficient for me, and the best one to trust in) on his lips. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم asked: 'Bring this man to me.' He said to him:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَلُومُ عَلَى الْعَجْزِ وَلَكِنْ عَلَيْكَ بِالْكَيْسِ فَإِذَا غَلَبَكَ أَمْرٌ فَقُلْ حَسْبِيَ اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ

Allah censures inaction but it is your duty to use means, following which, when you find yourself powerless against odds, then say: 'Allah is all-sufficient for me, and the best one to trust in.'

The third verse (174) recounts the blessings which descended upon these noble Companions for their brave response to the call of *Jihād* and for saying: حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ (Allah is all-sufficient for us, and the best one to trust in). It was said:

فَانْقَلَبُوا بِنِعْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَفَضْلٍ لَّمْ يَمَسَّسْهُمْ سُوءٌ وَاتَّبَعُوا رِضْوَانَ اللَّهِ

So, they returned with bounty from Allah, and grace, with no evil having even touched them -- and submitted to the pleasure of Allah.

Allah Almighty bestowed on them three blessings:

1. Such awe and terror was placed in the hearts of disbelievers that they ran away because of which the Companions remained protected against the rigours of fighting on the battlefield. Allah Almighty has used the very word *Ni'mah* for what we refer to as blessing.

2. The second blessing conferred on them was the opportunity to engage in trading in the market of *Ḥamrā'* al-Asad. The benefits yielded by such financial transactions were called '*Faql*' or the bounty from Allah.

3. The third and the highest of the three blessings was the attainment of the pleasure of Allah which these blessed souls received in

this *Jihād* in a special manner.

حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ : *Hasbunallāhu wa ni'mal-wakīl*: A wonderful prayer for all of us

The blessings of this prayer cited by the Holy Qur'ān were not limited to the Companions of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in any restrictive sense. The fact is that anyone who recites this prayer devotedly with a genuine sense of faith will share in such blessings.

Muslim scholars and spiritual masters have said that one who recites this verse a thousand times with true faith, and prays, will find that Allah Almighty has not rejected his prayer. Reciting this verse under the stress of frustrations and difficulties is a proven panacea.

The fourth verse (175) tells Muslims that the real agent behind the report that the disbelievers are coming back is Satan himself who would love to see Muslims overawed. In other words, Satan is threatening Muslims with the strength of his friends - his cohorts, the disbelievers. Thus, one of the two objects of the verb يُخَوِّفُ : *yukhawwifū* [frightens (you)] has been left out in the text. The one mentioned is in 'auliyā'ahū' (of his friends) while the one understood but not mentioned is 'you' as it would be in يُخَوِّفُكُمْ : *yukhawwifukum* (frightens you).

In the end, the verse exhorts Muslims not to fear such threats. What is necessary is that Muslims must continue fearing Allah, the natural outcome of which will be that a true Muslim will always think twice before embarking on anything that means disobedience to Allah. The truth of the matter is that, with Allah's help and support on ones' side, no harm can come from any side.

The Fear of Allah: What does it mean?

The imperative in the present verse obligates Muslims that they must always keep fearing Allah. In another verse, يَخَافُونَ رَبَّهُمْ مِنْ قَوْلِهِمْ (They fear their Lord above them-16:50) those who do so have been praised. Some revered elders have explained it by saying that fearing Allah does not mean that one should be scared stiff or sit back in tears. Far from it, a God-fearing person is one who leaves everything which may become a source of Allah's displeasure or punishment.

Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq, may Allāh's mercy be upon him, says that Abū

Bakr ibn al-Fuwarrah was sick so he paid him a visit. When Abū Bakr saw him, he was in tears. Abū 'Alī consoled him by saying that there was nothing to worry about, Allah Almighty will give him health soon enough. Abū Bakr corrected Abū 'Alī's impression and said that he was certainly not weeping because of any fear of death. What he really worried about was his fate after death lest he may be awarded some punishment then. (Qurtūbī)

Verses 176 - 178

وَلَا يَحْزُنُكَ الَّذِينَ يُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْكُفْرِ إِنَّهُمْ لَنْ يَضُرُّوا اللَّهَ شَيْئًا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَلَّا يَجْعَلَ لَهُمْ حَظًّا فِي الْآخِرَةِ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٧٦﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الْكُفْرَ بِالْإِيمَانِ لَنْ يَضُرُّوا اللَّهَ شَيْئًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١٧٧﴾ وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّمَا نُثَبِّتُ لَهُمْ خَيْرٌ لِّأَنفُسِهِمْ إِنَّمَا نَعْلِي لَهُمْ لِيَزْدَادُوا إِثْمًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ ﴿١٧٨﴾

Those who hasten towards disbelief should not make you grieve. They cannot harm Allah at all. Allah intends not to spare for them any share in the Hereafter. And for them there is a mighty punishment. [176] Certainly, those who bought disbelief in exchange of Belief cannot harm Allah at all. And for them there is a painful punishment. [177] And those who disbelieve should not think that the time We give them is good for them. In fact, We give them time only that they may increase in sin. And for them there is a humiliating punishment. [178]

Previous verses mentioned the treachery and ill-will of the hypocrites. The present verses comfort the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, asking him not to grieve over the mischiefs made by the disbelievers for they cannot harm him in any way.

The last verse (178) carries a refutation of the false notion about disbelievers: How can they, while obviously prospering in the present world, be regarded as victims of Allah's wrath and rejection?

Commentary

Material affluence of disbelievers is, after all, an extension of Divine punishment

Let there be no doubt about the worldly well-being of disbelievers for one may be tempted to believe that since Allah Almighty has given respite, long life, security and comfort to disbelievers so that they go on increasing in their crimes, they should, then, be taken as innocent. Far from it, because the verse means that Muslims should not feel upset about this temporary respite and affluence given to disbelievers as all this worldly wealth and power in their hands - despite their disbelief and disobedience - is nothing but a form of the very punishment destined for them. Today, they do not realize it. But, once they leave the mortal world, they would. They would discover to their dismay that all those articles of comfort they acquired and spent in sin were, in reality, the very embers of Hell. This is corroborated by several other verses of the Qur'ān. For instance, in **إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُعَذِّبَهُمْ بِهَا** (Allah intends to punish them with it - 9:55) which means that the wealth and power of disbelievers and their vulgarly luxurious consumerism should not be a matter of pride for them for this is nothing but an instalment of that very punishment from Allah which will cause their punishment in the Hereafter to increase.

Verse 179

مَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيَذَرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَىٰ مَا أَنْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ حَتَّىٰ يَمِيزَ
الْخَبِيثَ مِنَ الطَّيِّبِ ۚ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُظْلِعَكُمْ عَلَى الْغَيْبِ
وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَجْتَبِيٰ مِنْ رُّسُلِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۖ فَآمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ
وَرُسُلِهِ ۚ وَإِنْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَتَتَّقُوا فَلَكُمْ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٧٩﴾

Allah is not to leave the believers in what you are in unless He separates the impure from the pure. And Allah is not to inform you of the unseen. But Allah selects from His messengers whom He wills. So, believe in Allah and His messengers. And if you believe, and fear Allah, then, for you there is a great reward. [179]

The previous verse (178) answered the question about disbelievers as to why they, being the detested ones in the sight of Allah, are in possession of all sort of wealth, property and other means of luxurious

living?

The present verse (179), in sharp contrast, removes the doubt about true believers as to why they, being the favoured servants of Allah, are tested with all sorts of hardships? Being favoured required that they should have been the ones living in comfort surrounded by its paraphernalia !

Commentary

The wisdom of making a believer distinct from a hypocrite through practical demonstration rather than through a revelation.

It has been said in this verse that Allah Almighty has His way of making a sincere believer distinct from a hypocrite through which He generates such situations of hardship as would expose the hypocrisy of the hypocrites practically. This distinction, though, could also be made by identifying hypocrites by name through a revelation. But, the later course was not taken because it would have not been wise. The whole range of wisdom behind what Allah does is known to Him alone. However, one wise consideration in the present context could be: If Muslims were told about a person being a hypocrite through revelation, they would have had no difficulty in dealing with them carefully, but this would have not provided them with a clearly demonstrated proof necessarily acceptable to the hypocrites - for, they would have still insisted: 'You are wrong. We are true Muslims.'

Contrary to this, the distinction was made practically. The introduction of hardship put the hypocrites to test in which they failed and ran away. Their hypocrisy was demonstrated and exposed practically and openly. Now they did not have the cheek to claim that they were true, sincere and believing Muslims.

The manner in which the hypocrites were exposed yielded yet another benefit for Muslims when their formal relationship was also severed with the hypocrites. Otherwise, maintaining a state of discord in the heart with a veneer of formal social dealing would have been equally harmful ethically.

The Unseen when communicated to anyone is no Knowledge of the Unseen as such

This verse tells us that Allah Almighty does not inform everyone

about Unseen matters through the medium of revelation (*Wahy*). However, He does inform His chosen prophets in this manner. From this, let no one hasten to doubt that prophets too have become sharers in the Knowledge of the Unseen or the knowers of the Unseen! The reason is that the Knowledge of the Unseen which is particularly attributed to the being of Allah Almighty cannot be taken as being shared by any created being. Doing so is *Shirk* (the crime of ascribing partners to Allah). The particular Knowledge is fortified by two conditions:

1. This should be intrinsic to the being, not given by anyone else.

2. This has to be all-comprehensive, encompassing all universes, the past and the future - a Knowledge that covers even the minutest particle without any possibility of anything remaining hidden from it. As for things of the Unseen the information of which is given to His prophets by Allah Almighty through the medium of revelation (*Wahy*), they are not, really, the Knowledge of the Unseen as such. They are, rather, news of the Unseen given to prophets, something about which the Holy Qur'ān itself has used the expression *أَنْبَاءُ الْغَيْبِ* (news or reports of the Unseen) at several places :

مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهَا إِلَيْكَ

... a part of the news of the Unseen We reveal to you. (11:49)

Verses 180 - 186

وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ يَبْخُلُونَ بِمَا أَنَّهُمْ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ هُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّهُمْ ۚ بَلْ هُوَ شَرٌّ لَّهُمْ ۚ سَيُطَوَّقُونَ مَا بَخُلُوا بِهِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ ۚ وَلِلَّهِ مِيرَاثُ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٨٠﴾
لَقَدْ سَمِعَ اللَّهُ قَوْلَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ فَقِيرٌ وَنَحْنُ أَغْنِيَاءُ ۚ سَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَالُوا وَقَتْلُهُمُ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ ۚ وَنَقُولُ ذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ ﴿١٨١﴾ ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا قَدَّمْتُمْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَيْسَ بِظَلَّامٍ لِّلْعٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٨٢﴾ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ عٰهَدَ إِلَيْنَا آلَا

نُؤْمِنَ لِرَسُولٍ حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَنَا بِقُرْآنٍ تَأْكُلُهُ النَّارُ، قُلْ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ
 رَسُولٌ مِّن قَبْلِي بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَإِلَّذِي قُلْتُمْ فَلِمَ قَتَلْتُمُوهُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ
 صَادِقِينَ ﴿١٨٣﴾ فَإِنْ كَذَّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كُذِّبَ رَسُولٌ مِّن قَبْلِكَ جَاءُوا
 بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالزُّبُرِ وَالْكِتَابِ الْمُنِيرِ ﴿١٨٤﴾ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ
 وَإِنَّمَا تُوَفَّقُونَ أُجُورَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ فَمَن زُحْزِحَ عَنِ النَّارِ
 وَأُدْخِلَ الْجَنَّةَ فَقَدْ فَازَ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ
 ﴿١٨٥﴾ لَتَبْلُوَنَ فِي أَمْوَالِكُمْ وَأَنفُسِكُمْ وَلَتَسْمَعَنَّ مِنَ الَّذِينَ
 أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ وَمِنَ الَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا أَذَىٰ كَثِيرًا وَإِنْ
 تَصْبِرُوا وَتَتَّقُوا فَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ مِنْ عَزْمِ الْأُمُورِ ﴿١٨٦﴾

And those who are miserly with what Allah has given them out of His grace should not take it as good for them. Instead, it is bad for them. They shall be forced, on the Doomsday, to put on round their necks the shackles of what they were miserly with. And to Allah belongs the inheritance of the heavens and the earth. And of what you do, Allah is All-Aware. [180]

Allah has surely heard the saying of those who said, "Allah is poor and we are rich." We shall write down what they said, and their killing of the prophets unjustly; and We shall say, "Taste the punishment of the flaming fire. [181] This is due to what your hands sent ahead and that Allah is not cruel to the slaves." [182]

(There are) those who said, "Surely, Allah directed us that we should not believe in a messenger unless he comes to us with an offering to be eaten up by the fire." Say, "A number of messengers have come to you, before me, with clear signs and with what you have said. So, why did you kill them, if you are true? [183]

Then if they belie you, so messengers have been belied before you. They came with clear signs and the Scriptures and light giving Book. [184]

Every soul has to taste death. And it is on the Doomsday that you shall be paid your rewards in full. So, whoever has been kept away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise, he has really succeeded. And the wordly life is nothing but an asset, full of illusion. [185]

Of course, you shall be tested in your wealth and yourselves. And, of course, you shall hear much of what hurts, from those who have been given the Book before you and from those who associate (others with Allah). And if you observe patience and fear Allah, then these are among matters of determination. [186]

Anomalies in the conduct of Jews were mentioned at the beginning of Sūrah 'Āl-'Imrān (21-25). The text now reverts back to the same subject. The verses cited above carry related topics. In between, there are words of comfort for the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم as well as those giving good counsel to Muslims.

Commentary

The first (180) of the seven verses (180-186) appearing here repudiates miserliness and carries a warning for those who practice it.

The Definition of Miserliness and the punishment it brings

In the terminology of the Shari'ah of Islam, miserliness (*Bukhl*) refers to the act of not spending that which it is obligatory to spend in the way of Allah. Therefore, miserliness is forbidden (*ḥarām*). Besides, it carries a stern warning of Hell for its practitioners. As for occasions where spending is not obligatory (*wājib*) but only recommended (*mustaḥabb*), then not spending there is not included under the miserliness which is forbidden. However, this too is called miserliness in its general sense. As said earlier, this kind of miserliness is not forbidden (*ḥarām*) but against the preferred choice (*khilāf aulā*) it certainly is.

Appearing in *Ḥadīth*, there is another word - *Shuḥḥ* - also used in the sense of *Bukhl* or miserliness. By definition, it means not spending what it was obligatory to spend - one may go even farther than that by remaining consumed with greed to increase one's wealth. This then, shall be a crime much more severe than ordinary miserliness. Therefore, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said:

لَا يَجْتَمِعُ شُحٌّ وَإِيمَانٌ فِي قَلْبِ رَجُلٍ مُسْلِمٍ أَبَدًا

That is, miserliness (*shuḥḥ*) and faith (ʿ*Imān*) can never coexist in the heart of a Muslim. (Qurtubī)

The punishment for miserliness (*Bukhl*) mentioned in this verse: 'They shall be forced, on the Doomsday, to put on round their necks the shackles of what they were miserly with' has been explained by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in the following words reported by Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah رضى الله عنه :

'Anyone Allah blessed with some wealth and who did not pay the *zakāh* due on it properly will find his or her wealth turn into a deadly snake shackled round the neck chomping at the person's mouth from one to the other end of the lips and saying: 'I am your wealth. I am your capital gain.' Thereafter, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم recited this verse (180). (Al-Nasā'ī, from Tafsīr al-Qurtubī)

The second verse (18) warns Jews against their grave act of effrontery and mentions its punishment. According to the background of the event, when the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم presented the Qur'ānic injunctions relating to *Zakāh* and *Ṣadaqāt* (charities), the arrogant Jews started saying that Allah had surely become poor and needy while they were rich, or else why would He go about asking us to give? We seek refuge with Allah from such effrontery. Obviously, they would have hardly believed in the absurd statement they made but, in all likelihood, they would have said so to prove that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was God forbid, false in his statement. Their argument was: If these verses of the Qur'ān are true, then, it necessarily follows that Allah be poor and needy! This absurd argument of theirs being false in itself was not worth responding to because the injunction of Allah Almighty was not for His benefit; it was, rather, for the benefit of the owners of wealth themselves in this world and the hereafter. But, it was termed as giving loan to Allah elsewhere because repayment of a loan is necessary and certain in the sight of every good person. Similar is the case of charity given by someone, the repayment of which Allah Almighty takes upon Himself as if it was the payment of loan taken from someone. Anyone who believes in Allah Almighty as the Creator and Master of everything would never stoop to entertain the kind of doubt from these words of the verse which is there in the saying of the insolent Jews. For this reason, the

Qur'ān has certainly refrained from answering this doubt. Instead, it has simply restricted itself to announcing that they shall be apprehended and punished for this effrontery of theirs, for having falsified the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and for having made fun of him. It was said that their insolent words will be put on record in 'writing' so that the final evidence goes against them on the Day of Judgment and they are punished for what they did. Otherwise, Allah Almighty needs no writing.

Along with this act of effrontery committed by the Jews, yet another crime of theirs has been mentioned, that is, they not only falsified the prophets and mocked at them, they even went to the limit of killing them! That such people could falsify and flout any prophet or messenger of Allah hardly remains surprising.

Staying emotionally satisfied with disbelief in and disobedience to Allah is also an equally grave sin

Worth noticing at this point is the fact that those being addressed by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and the Qur'ān are the Jews of Madīnah while the incident of the killing of prophets belongs to a time much earlier than theirs, that is, to the time of Sayyidnā Yahyā and Sayyidnā Zakariyyā, may peace be on them. Now, the question is: How is it that the crime of the killing of the prophets referred to in this verse was attributed to these addressees? The reason is: The Jews of Madīnah were quite satisfied with this act committed by their Jewish predecessors, therefore, they too were counted as those who fall under the injunction governing killers of prophets.

Imām al-Qurṭubī has said in his *Tafsīr* that 'remaining satisfied with disbelief (*kufr*) is also included under disbelief and disobedience' which is a major juristic ruling in Islam. A saying of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم explains it further. He said:

'When a sin is committed on God's earth, following which, the person who is present on the spot opposes that sin and considers it to be bad, then, such a person shall be deemed as not present there, that is, he is no accomplice in their sin. And, a person who, though not present physically yet is quite satisfied with this act of sinners, then, this person shall be considered, despite his absence (from the scene of sin), an accomplice in their sin.'

In the later part of the present verse (181) and in the third verse (182), the text recounts the punishment to be meted out to such loud-mouthed people by saying that they shall be consigned to the Hell to experience the taste of burning in fire which is but the outcome of their own deeds and certainly no injustice from Allah. The fourth verse (183) takes up the case of a false accusation made by these very Jews who came up with an excuse in order to reject the prophethood of the Messenger of Allah. Their contention was that, during the period of past prophets, there used to be a method under which charities and offerings were placed in the centre of an open ground or on top of a hill where heavenly fire came and burnt these to ashes. This used to symbolize that offerings were accepted. But, to the Holy Prophet ﷺ and to his community, Allah Almighty had given the unique distinction that charities were not left to be consumed by heavenly fire. They were given to the poor and needy among Muslims. Since the later method was contrary to the former, the disbelievers found an excuse to say: If you were a prophet, you too would have been given the miracle whereby the heavenly fire would have consumed the offerings and charities. They, not resting at that, became audacious enough to fabricate lies against Allah Almighty claiming that 'He has taken pledge from them to the effect that they are not to believe in a person who is unable to cause the miracle of the coming of a heavenly fire which burns the charitable offerings.'

Since this claim of the Jews that Allah had taken a pledge from them was false, there was really no need to counter it. So, to disarm them through their very proven saying, Allah Almighty said: If you are true in saying that Allah has taken such a pledge from you, then, the past prophets who had obliged you by showing the miracle of your choice whereby the heavenly fire consumed the offerings certainly deserved that you should have at least believed in them! But, what actually happened is that you did not spare them either. You still falsified them. In fact, you went to the extreme of transgression by killing them.

Let no one have any doubt here despite the fact that while this claim of the Jews was absolutely false, may be, if this miracle did come to pass at the hand of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم chances were that

they would probably have come to believe. Such a doubt is unfounded because Allah Almighty knew that these people were saying such things simply out of hostility and obstinacy. Thus, even if the miracle they demanded came to pass, they would have still not believed.

In the fifth verse (184), the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been comforted by saying that he should not grieve at being falsified by his adversaries for this is something faced by all prophets in the past.

Thoughts of the Hereafter heal all sorrows and remove all doubts

The sixth verse (185) puts a sharp focus on the ultimate reality of things in a situation when sometime somewhere disbelievers come to enjoy ascendancy one way or the other and they have all the luxury they can think of in this world. Contrary to this, Muslims have to face some hardships, some difficulties and a certain paucity of worldly means. There is nothing surprising about it and certainly no occasion to be grieved, for no follower of a faith or philosophy can ignore the reality of life that sorrow and happiness in this world are both short-lived. No living creature can escape death. As for the comfort and discomfort experienced in this world, they vanish, more than often, right there with relevant changes in circumstances - or, just in case, no change takes place during the life of this world, it is certain that everything will end with the knock of death. Therefore, worrying about this short-lived cycle of comfort and discomfort should not become the chronic concern of a wise person. One should, rather, have concern for what would happen after death.

So, the verse (185) tells us that every living being shall taste death and once in the Hereafter, there shall come the reward and punishment of deeds which will be severe and long drawn as well. This is what a wise person should worry about and prepare for. Given this rule of conduct, one who stays away from Hell and finds entry into the Paradise is really the successful one. May be this happens at the very beginning as would be the case with the most righteous servants of Allah. Or, it may come to pass after having faced some punishment as would be the case with sinning Muslims. But, Muslims - all of them - will finally have their deliverance from Hell and the blessings of Paradise will become theirs for ever. This will be contrary to what happens

so disbelievers - Hell will be their eternal resting place. If they wax proud over their short-lived worldly gains, they are terribly deceived. That is why it was said at the end of the verse: 'And the worldly life is nothing but an asset, full of illusion.' Strange is the anatomy of this deception, for reckless material enjoyments here become the source of great hardships in the Hereafter and conversely, most of the hardships faced here become the treasure of the Hereafter.

People of Falsehood hurting people of Truth is a natural phenomena: Patience (*Ṣabr*) and piety (*Taqwā*) cure everything

The seventh verse (186) was revealed in the background of a particular event which has been briefly referred to a little earlier in verse 181. According to relevant details, when verse 245 of Sūrah al-Baqarah: مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يقرضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا (who is the one who would give Allah a good loan) was revealed, it eloquently equated the givings of charities to the giving of loan to Allah thereby indicating that all givings in charity in the life of this world will be recompensed with a certainty like that of someone returning a loan taken. An ignorant or hostile Jew reacted by commenting in the following words: إِنَّ اللَّهَ فَقِيرٌ وَنَحْنُ أَغْنِيَاءُ (Allah is poor and we are rich). Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه was angry at his effrontery and slapped him. The Jew complained to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. Thereupon, the verse: لَتَجِدَنَّ فِي أَمْوَالِكُمْ وَأَنفُسِكُمْ آيَةً (Of course, you shall be tested in your wealth and yourselves) was revealed. This verse instructs Muslims that they should not show weakness when called to stake their wealth and life in the defence of their Faith or when they are hurt by the vituperations of the disbelievers, the polytheists and the people of the Book. All this is nothing but a trial for them. The best course for them is to observe restraint, be patient and keep to their real objective in life which is the achievement of the perfect state of *Taqwā*, (a state in which one fears Allah and remains answerable to Him all the time). In such a state Muslims should not worry about replying to the effrontery by antagonists.

Verses 187 - 189

وَإِذَا أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ لَتُبَيِّنُنَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَكْتُمُونَهُ فَنَبَذُوهُ وَرَاءَ ظُهُورِهِمْ وَاشْتَرَوْا بِهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا

فَيْئَسَ مَا يَشْتَرُونَ ﴿١٨٧﴾ لَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ يَفْرَحُونَ بِمَا آتَوْا
وَيُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يُحْمَدُوا بِمَا لَمْ يَفْعَلُوا ۖ فَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّهُمْ بِمَفَازَةٍ مِنَ
الْعَذَابِ ۖ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١٨٨﴾ وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ السَّمَوَاتِ
وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٨٩﴾

And when Allah took pledge from those who were given the Book: "You shall make it known to people, and you shall not conceal it." So, they threw it away behind their backs and bought a small price out of it. So, evil is what they buy. [187]

And do not think of those who are delighted with what they did and love to be praised for what they never did - so, do not think of them as being in a position to escape the punishment. And a painful punishment is there for them. [188] And to Allah belongs the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth. And Allah is powerful over everything. [189]

In continuation of the description of evils practiced by the Jews mentioned in previous verses, the first of the present two verses (187) takes up yet another evil practice of theirs. This is their habit of going back on solemn pledges and covenants - for Allah Almighty had taken pledge from the people of the Book that they would communicate the commandments of Allah appearing in the Torah freely, openly and universally and that they would not conceal any injunction out of their selfish ends. The people of the Book broke this covenant. They concealed injunctions. Not only that, they were audacious enough to show their pleasure about having acted in this manner and taking this deed of theirs as commendable.

Commentary

Concealing the Knowledge of Faith is forbidden and waiting or manipulating to be praised without practicing it is deplorable

The three verses cited above describe two crimes committed by scholars from the people of the Book along with their subsequent punishment.

As pointed out earlier, they were commanded to tell their people about injunctions revealed in the Book of Allah freely and openly

without any effort to curtail or hold back what was in there. Although, they were explicitly instructed not to hide any commandment, yet they elected to ignore the pledge they had made, out of their worldly considerations and personal greed. They did hide a good many commandments from their people.

Secondly, they had the problem of personally staying aloof from acting righteously while, at the same time, they had no qualms of conscience in wishing to be praised without acting the way they were expected to.

As for the incidence of hiding the commandments of the Torah, it has been reported in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī on the authority of Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās. He narrates that the Holy Prophet ﷺ asked the Jews about something mentioned in the Torah. They concealed the truth and told him something contrary to what was said in the Torah - and they left his company all pleased with their exercise in evil congratulating themselves on their deceit. Thereupon, this verse which carries a warning for them was revealed.

As for the other statement 'they love to be praised for what they never did' - it refers to the hypocrites among the Jews who would make excuses at the time of *Jihād*, sit home and celebrate how well they were able to dodge the hardships of *Jihād*. When the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم returned from *Jihād*, they would go to him, take false oaths, offer excuses and, on top of that, they would demand that this act of theirs be praised. (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī)

The Holy Qur'an condemns them for both these attitudes. From here, we know that concealing the knowledge of Faith and the injunctions of Allah and His Messenger is forbidden (*Harām*). But, this forbiddance applies to the kind of concealment which was practiced by the Jews for they used to conceal Divine injunctions to promote their own worldly interest and, in this process, they made people pay for it. However, if an injunction is not broadcast publicly due to some expedient religious consideration, such an action would not fall under the purview of this ruling. This problem has been taken up by Imām al-Bukhārī under a separate subject heading supported by relevant *Hadīth* narrations. According to him, there are occasions when there is the danger that masses would fall prey to misunderstanding and

disorder by publicising a certain injunction openly. If an injunction is allowed to remain unpublicised on the basis of such a danger, it does not matter.

The rule about doing a good deed is simple. If anyone does a good deed, then looks forward to be praised for it - or, worse still, takes elaborate steps to make this happen - then, despite having done what one did, this act will be deemed blameworthy under the Islamic legal-moral norms. And should one elect not to do that good deed at all, that would, then, be taken as far more blameworthy. As for the natural desire to do something good and thereby earn a fair name, it is not included under the purview of this ruling - unless, of course, if one does not make unusual projections to earn that fair name (Bayān al-Qur'ān).

Verses 190 - 194

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمُوتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لَآيَاتٍ
لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿١٩٠﴾ الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَ
عَلَى جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمُوتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا
خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ ﴿١٩١﴾ رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ
مَنْ تُدْخِلِ النَّارَ فَقَدْ أَخْزَيْتَهُ، وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ أَنْصَارٍ
﴿١٩٢﴾ رَبَّنَا إِنَّا سَمِعْنَا مُنَادِيًا يُنَادِي لِلْإِيمَانِ أَنْ آمِنُوا
بِرَبِّكُمْ فَأَمَنَّا رَبَّنَا فَأَغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَكَفِّرْ عَنَّا سَيِّئَاتِنَا وَتَوَقَّنَا
مَعَ الْأَبْرَارِ ﴿١٩٣﴾ رَبَّنَا وَإِنَّا مَا وَعَدْتَنَا عَلَى رُسُلِكَ وَ
لَا تُخْزِنَا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ، إِنَّكَ لَا تُخْلِفُ الْمِيعَادَ ﴿١٩٤﴾

Surely, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are signs for the people of wisdom, [190] who remember Allah standing and sitting, and (lying) on their sides, and ponder on the creation of the heavens and the earth (saying:) "Our Lord, You have not created all this in vain. We proclaim Your purity. So, save us from the punishment of Fire. [191] Our Lord, whomsoever You

admit into the Fire, You have disgraced him indeed. And for the unjust there are no supporters. Our Lord, We heard a herald calling towards Faith: 'Believe in your Lord.' And We believed. [192] Our Lord, forgive us, then, our sins, and write off our evil deeds, and take us unto You with the righteous. [193] And our Lord, give us what You have promised us through Your messengers, and do not put us to disgrace on the Day of Doom. Surely you do not got back on Your promise." [194]

Verse 189 appearing immediately earlier particularly and strongly stressed upon *Tauḥīd*, the Oneness of Allah. So, the verse (190) which follows here, presents the proof of *Tauḥīd* and, along with it, mentions the merit of those who act strictly in accordance with the dictates of *Tauḥīd* and, by implication, it also motivates others to do the same.

In addition, the earlier mention of pain caused by the disbelievers bears congruity to the verses appearing presently. This can be understood in the background in which the disbelievers, out of hostility, requested the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم that he should turn Mount Ṣafā into solid gold. Thereupon, this verse was revealed indicating that there were so many proofs confirming the Truth all around them - why would they not deliberate in them?

As for the reality of their request to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, it was not motivated to find out the Truth. Instead, it was out of hostility - so, they would have still not believed, even if their request was granted.

Commentary

The background of Revelation

Commenting on the background of revelation concerning these verses, Ibn Ḥibbān in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* and Ibn 'Asākir in his *History* have reported that the Companion 'Aṭā ibn Abī Rabāḥ رضى الله عنه went to Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضى الله عنها and said to her: 'Of the things about the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, tell me what you saw as most unique out of the many states of his life.' Thereupon, Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah said: 'Which state are you talking about? In reality, everything about him was unique. Yet, I would tell you about one very unique event. It so happened that the noble Prophet, may Allah bless and protect him, came to me one night and entered into the comforter with me. Then,

he said: 'Allow me to worship my Lord.' He rose from the bed, made *Wuḍū* and stood up for *Ṣalāh*. And in this standing position of *Qiyām*, he wept, so much so that his tears trickled down his blessed chest. Then, he bent down for *Rukū'* and there too he wept. Then he did his *Sajdah* and kept weeping in the *Sajdah* very much like before. Then, he raised his head and continued weeping until came the morning. Sayyidnā Bilāl came in and informed him about the time of the *Fajr Ṣalāh*. Sayyidnā Bilāl says: I submitted: 'my master, why do you weep like that? Is'nt it that Allah Almighty has forgiven you all your past and future sins?' He said: 'So then, should I not continue to be a grateful servant of Allah? And in offering this gratitude of mine, why should I not shed tears, specially tonight when Allah Almighty has revealed this blessed verse to me :

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ...

Surely, in the creation of the heavens and the earth... (190)

After that, he said: "Ruined is the person who recited these verses but failed to deliberate therein."

So, in order to deliberate into this verse, let us begin by answering some questions first.

What does 'the creation of the heavens and the earth' mean?

Since *Khalq* is a verbal noun which signifies creation or origination, it means that there are, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, great signs of Allah Almighty. Therefore, all those Divinely created beings and things in the heavens and the earth also get to be included therein. Then, among these created beings there are kingdoms after kingdoms - each having different types and states - yet each and every such created being is comprehensively pointing out to its Creator. Then, going a little deeper, one would discover that 'the heavens' is inclusive of all heights and 'the earth' covers all lows. Thus, high or low, all dimensions owe their existence to Allah Almighty.

The different forms of 'the alternation of the night and day'

Let us now determine the meaning of 'the alternation of the night and day'. The word '*Ikhtilāf*' translated here as 'alternation' is derived from the Arabic usage: اختلف ثلاثاً ثلاثاً (Such and such person arrived after

such and such person). So, the Arabic expression translated as 'the alternation of the night and day' means that the night goes and the day comes and when the day goes, night comes.

The word *Ikhtilāf* translated here as 'alternation' could also be taken to mean increase or decrease. For example, during winter, the night is long and the day is short; while during the summer, the order is reversed. Similarly, the difference between the night and day is also caused by the difference in the geographical location of countries. For example, countries closer to the North Pole have longer days as compared to areas farther away from it. So, it should not be difficult to infer from each such phenomena the essential proof of the most perfect power of Allah Almighty.

What is the meaning of the word, *Āyāt* ?

Āyāt (آيَات) is the plural of *Āyah* (آيَة) and is used to express more than one single meaning. Miracles are known as *Āyāt*. It is also applied to the verses of the Holy Qur'ān. It is also used in a third sense, that of proof and sign. Here, in the present context, this very third sense is what is intended - meaning that, in these manifestations, there are great signs of Allah, and the proofs of His power.

Wise are those who believe in Allah and always remember Him

To determine the meaning of the expression اولو الالباب , we look into the word '*albāb*' which is the plural of *lubb*. Lexically, it means the essence. Since the essence of everything is its sum-total and the key to its nature and uses, therefore, human wisdom has been called *lubb*, for wisdom is the essence of human nature. Thus, '*albāb*' means 'the people of wisdom'.

Now the problem before us is how to identify the people of wisdom because the whole world claims to be wise. Not even a moron would be ready to admit being devoid of wisdom, reason or sense. Therefore, the Holy Qur'ān has told us about some signs which are, in fact, the most sound criterion of wisdom. The first such sign is Faith in Allah. Think of the knowledge which comes from the senses such as hearing, seeing, smelling and tasting and communication, something also found in non-rational animals. Now, it is the job of wisdom or reason to arrive, through signs, circumstantial evidence and proofs, at a particular conclusion which is beyond sense-perception and through which it may

become possible to grasp the final link of the chain of causes.

Keeping this rule in view, just think about this universe around us. It should not be too difficult to realize that this wonderfully organised system - comprising the heavens and the earth and containing the whole of creation in between them which is further streamlined by the most deft management of everything, big or small, existing therein - certainly points out to a special Being that has to be the highest and the foremost in terms of Knowledge, Wisdom, Power and Authority. A Being who originated and fashioned all these components with the wisest of consideration and under Whose intention and will this whole system keeps operating. That Being, as obvious, can only be that of the most-exalted Allah. How well some spiritual master has put it in a few words:

ہر گیا ہے کہ از زمین روید ، وحده لا شریک له گوید

Every blade of grass sprouting from the earth

Says: He is One; there are no partners in Him.

That human intentions and plans keep failing everywhere all the time is a matter of common experience. These cannot be called the prime movers and operators of this universal system. Therefore, the outcome of the deliberation into the creation of the heavens and the earth and into what has been created in them is, as wisdom dictates, living to know, obey and remember Allah. Anyone unmindful of it does not deserve to be classed as wise. Therefore, the Holy Qur'an has given the following sign of the wise:

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ

That is, the wise are those who remember Allah - standing and sitting and (lying) on their sides (191).

In other words it means that they are engaged in the remembrance of Allah under all conditions and at all times.

From here we find out that the thing which our modern world takes as the criterion of reason and good sense is simply a deception. Catering to greed, some people take accumulation of money as their ideal of intelligence. There are others who love to equate human intelligence with scientific inventions and electronic applications and for them, these are the power. But, real good sense lies in the message

brought by the prophets and Messengers of Allah Almighty, for they, proceeding through knowledge and wisdom and advancing from the low to the high in the chain of causation, skipped the intermediary stages. Granted that human beings moved from raw materials to machines and science gave them access to power through utilization of energy generated in many ways. But, higher intelligence demands that human beings take that real giant step farther ahead so that they can discover that the main agent of human accomplishment is certainly not the water or clay or iron or copper or some other material, not even the machines that generate power. This function was accomplished by none else but the One who created the fire, the water and the air through which human beings were enabled to control technology and energy:

کار زلفِ تست مشک افشانی اما عاشقان
مصلحتِ راتہمتے بر آہوئے چین بستہ اند

Spreading the scent of musk is the function of Your tresses
But, those who love You have, out of expediency,
ascribed the credit to the Chinese deer!

Let us understand this through the commonplace example of an ignorant dweller of some distant jungle who reaches a railway station and notices that such a huge railway train stops at the flash of a red flag while it starts moving at the flutter of a green one. Then, should he say that these red and green flags must have super power as they can stop and move such a powerful engine of the big train. Obviously, all sensible people would dismiss the ignoramus telling him that no power is vested in these flags. Instead, power rests with the person who is sitting in the engine room and stops or moves the train by watching these signals. But, someone smarter might reject the assumption that the engine driver had any intrinsic power to move or stop the train. His strength had nothing to do with it. He will go a step farther and attribute this power to the mechanical parts of the engine. But, a scientist would bypass cold mechanics of the engine and ascribe the real power to the steam which has been generated in the engine through heat and water. But, that is as far as the so-called scientific thinking goes. At this point, comes the thinking of the prophets, may peace be upon them, who would be telling these tyrants of their intel-

lect: If the ignoramus who took the flags or the driver or the engine parts as the respository of power was in error, so are those who take sources of energy powerful by themselves - intellectually, they too are in error! The prophets would ask them to take yet another step forward so that they could lay their hands on the lost end of this tangled ball of string. May be, by doing so, they could have access to the final link of the great chain of caused things and there they could find the answer that the ultimate master of all power is none else but the One who created all forces which were harnessed to achieve human models of power.

It is not difficult to deduce from what has been said here that those who get to know Allah and remember Him at all times and under all conditions are the only people who deserve to be called 'the wise'. It is for this reason that the Holy Qur'ān has defined the 'People of Wisdom' as *الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ* : '... those who remember Allah standing and sitting, and (lying) on their sides.'

It is on this basis that Muslim jurists have answered the case of a deceased person who, before his death, made a will that his property be given to the wise. As to who will be given this property, they have ruled that those who will deserve this are abstaining scholars who do not seek unnecessary material resources and are averse to the blind pursuit of the worldly, for they are the wise ones in the real sense. (al-Durr al-Mukhtār, Kitābul-Waṣiyyah)

Also worth attention at this point is the fact that the Sharī'ah of Islam has not enjoined abundance in any other mode of worship except *Dhikr*. But, about *Dhikr*, the command is: *وَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ ذِكْرًا كَثِيرًا* (Remember Allah remembering abundantly). The reason is that all modes of worship, other than *Dhikr*, have some conditions and rules without observing which those acts of worship are not considered to have been duly performed. This is contrary to *Dhikr* which can be performed at all times and under all conditions whether standing, sitting, lying, with or without *wuḍū*. Perhaps, this verse is indicative of this element of wisdom.

The second sign of the people of wisdom given in this verse is that they deliberate in the creation of the heavens and the earth:

يَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

And ponder on the creation of the heavens and the earth - 191.

Here we need to determine the meaning of this act of 'pondering' and the level at which it operates.

The Arabic words, *Fikr* and *Tafakkur*, literally mean to ponder, to deliberate and think about something which is an effort to arrive at its reality. From this verse we find out that this act of pondering is also an act of worship and very much like the *Dhikr* (Remembrance) of Allah. The difference is that the objective of *Dhikr* is the remembrance of the Being and Attributes of Almighty Allah while the objective of *Fikr* and *Tafakkur* or thinking and deliberation relates to His creations. This is because the perception of the reality of the Divine Being and the Attributes is beyond human reason. Deliberation of this aspect results in nothing but wonder. The great poet, Rumi said:

دور بینان بارگاهِ الست ، غیر از پسِ نبرده اندکِ هست

Expert watchers of the Court of the Being of the Covenant
Found out nothing but that He is.

In fact, this is an area of inquiry where excessive deliberation in the Being and Attributes of Almighty Allah could, at times, cause one's imperfect reason to stray into error. Therefore, the greatest among spiritual masters have emphatically advised:

تَفَكَّرُوا فِي آيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَتَفَكَّرُوا فِي اللَّهِ

Deliberate in the signs of Allah, but do not deliberate in Allah.

It means that there are signs in what Allah has created. One should think about these signs. But, one should not deliberate into the very Being and Attributes of Almighty Allah for that is beyond one's reach. One can see everything in the light of the sun. But, should one wish to see the sun itself, his eyes would get dazzled. Who is Allah? What is He like? These are questions all wise thinkers and spiritual masters have answered by suggesting :

نہ ہر جائے مرکب توان تاخت

کہ جاہا سیر باید انداخت

You do not have to mount an assault on every field of inquiry
For, there are places where you should simply surrender.

However, thinking about creation inevitably leads one to realize the presence of its Creator. Look at the enormous expanse of the sky above us with the sun, the moon and the many planets and stars bound with the solar and lunar system under firm and pre-determined laws working so well for thousands of years without being serviced or refurbished in some workshop. Then, there is this earth of ours, its rivers and mountains holding many marvels of creation, the trees, animals and hidden minerals, and the air that circulates in between the heavens and the earth and the rains that come and the electricity generated therein. This whole system so elaborately set up leads every sane person who is willing to think and understand that there is some special Being which is far ahead of everyone in power and control. This is what *Ma'rifat* is, the stage of knowing, realizing. So, this kind of deliberation which leads to the discovery of the Divine is an act of worship, a great one indeed. For this reason, Ḥaḍrat Ḥasan Baṣrī said: *تفكر ساعة خير من قيام ليلة* (Ibn Kathīr) which means: An hour spent in thinking about the signs of Allah is better and far more useful than a whole night standing in worship.

Ḥaḍrat 'Umar ibn 'Abdul-'Azīz has characterized this deliberation as a superior act of worship (Ibn Kathīr).

Sayyidnā Ḥasan ibn 'Amīr رضى الله عنه said that he had heard from many noble Companions that deliberation is the light of faith.

Ḥaḍrat Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī said: When I go out from my house, everything I cast my glance on makes me realize that it contains one or the other blessing of Allah for me and that in its presence I have a good source of learning my lesson (Ibn Kathīr). So, the knowers of the secrets of the self have always maintained:

Every blade of grass sprouting from the earth
Says: He is One and in Him there is no partner.

Ḥaḍrat Sufyān ibn 'Uyaynah has said: Reflection is a beam of light entering your heart.

Hadrat Wahb ibn Munabbih said: One who thinks a lot will understand reality, and who understands will arrive at sound knowledge, and who has sound knowledge is bound to act accordingly (Ibn Kathīr).

Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar رضى الله عنه said: A pious man saw an ascetic sitting at a spot with a graveyard on one of his sides and a garbage dump on the other. The passing pious man remarked - You have two treasure troves before you, one of them is the human treasure known as graveyard and the other is the treasure of wealth and property turned into refuse and filth. These two treasures are enough to learn your lesson. (Ibn Kathīr)

Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar رضى الله عنه used to go out of the city into some wilderness with the express purpose of training and teaching his heart. When he reached there, he would ask the spot of land: Where are those who lived here? (أين اهلك؟) After that, he would answer his own question by saying: Everything must perish save the presence of His being (كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ). (Ibn Kathīr). This was how he summoned and preserved the remembrance of Afterlife in his heart.

Hadrat Bishr al-Hāfī said: If people pondered over the greatness of Almighty Allah, it would have become impossible for them to remain sinful and disobedient.

Sayyidnā 'Isā عليه السلام said: O you who were created weak, fear God wherever you are. Live in the world like a guest. Make prayer places your home. Let your eyes weep fearing God, let your body remain patient and let your heart keep reflecting. Used to this, worry not about tomorrow's bread.

It is this kind of thoughtfulness and concern that these verses identify as the superior quality of wise people. Pondering over the creation of Almighty Allah, such people get to know their Creator and are personally convinced of the temporality of the physical world. This is a superb act of worship resplendent with the light of faith. Similarly, those who see and experience the signs of Almighty Allah yet get entangled with the superficial glamour of what has been created - as a result of which they fail to know their real master - is rank heedlessness and very much juvenile. Sages have warned that whoever fails to learn a lesson from the universe before his eyes will find that the ability of his heart to realize the truth has corroded in proportion to his heedlessness. The eager protagonists of scientific progress all too engrossed in their breakthroughs fail to pay heed to their own ultimate fate. Consequently, the speed with which developments in scien-

tific inquiry unfold the secrets of Allah's creation is also the speed at which they are receding farther away from reality and God. Commenting on the post-industrial revolution thinking, Akbar of Allahabad, poet, humourist, said:

بہول کر بیٹھا ہے یورپ آسمانی باپ کو
بس خدا سمجھا ہے اس نے برق کو اور بہاؤ کو
Europe has forgotten the Father in the Heaven
For them, electricity and steam are as good as God.

It is about such visionless people with the dead weight of education and culture on their backs, the Holy Qur'an says:

وَكَايْنِ مِنْ آيَةٍ فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ يَمُرُّوْنَ عَلَيْهَا وَهُمْ عَنْهَا مُعْرِضُوْنَ
And there are so many signs in the heavens and the earth
which these people pass by with faces turned askance paying
no heed to them - 12:109.

Now, as we move to the last part of this verse (191), رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هٰذَا بَاطِلًا (Our Lord, You have not created all this in vain), we can clearly see that this is the outcome of pondering over the signs of Allah's power. It means that there is nothing purposeless in Allah's creation. On the contrary, there are thousands of wise considerations behind it. Things have been harnessed to serve human beings with man being the user of resources in the whole universe. This should make human beings see that the universe has been created for their benefit and in their interest. Likewise, every human being has been created to obey and worship Allah. This is his or her purpose of life.

Further on, from verses 192 to 194, there appears a set of pleas and prayers from such people, people who realized that this universe is no exercise in futility and that it is brimming with open proofs of the great power and wisdom of its Creator. So, once they knew their Creator and Sustainer, they submitted before Him.

1. The first request they make is: رَبَّنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ : Save us from the Fire.

2. The second request is: Save us from the disgrace of the Hereafter for whoever is condemned to the Fire stands humiliated before the whole world. Some scholars have said that humiliation on the plains of Ressurrection will be so disgraceful a punishment that one

would wish to be cast into the (fire of) Hell but that the multitudes present on that fateful day do not get to hear about his or her misdeeds.

3. The third request is: 'We have heard the message given by the herald sent by You, that is, the message of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and we believed in him. So, forgive our major sins and expiate our shortcomings and misdeeds and give us death in the company of the righteous, that is, make us a part of their group.'

These three requests were aimed at safety against punishment and pain and loss. The fourth request is about promised blessings, the blessings of Paradise promised through the noble prophets. This prayer for blessings is being made with the added request that there be no disgrace on the Day of Judgment. In other words, the request is to be excused from the torturous procedure of accounting (for all of one's deeds), disgrace (as a result of misdeeds) and then forgiveness (on account of Allah's mercy). The prayer is for outright forgiveness for Allah does not go back on His word. What is the purpose of this submission and re-submission? The purpose is to say: O Allah, enable us to become deserving, and a beneficiary of this promise (made by You), and enable us to remain steadfast so that we breath our last in this world with faith in our heart (ایمان) and busy doing what is good in Your sight (عمل صالح).

Verses 195 - 199

فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِّنْكُمْ مِّنْ
ذِكْرِ أَوْ أَنشَأَ بَعْضُكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْضٍ ۖ فَاَلَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَأُخْرِجُوا
مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ وَأُودُوا فِي سَبِيلِي ۖ وَقَتُلُوا ۖ وَقَاتِلُوا ۖ لَا كُفْرَانَ عَنْهُمْ
سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلَآ أُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ثَوَابًا مِّنْ
عِنْدِ اللَّهِ ۖ وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الثَّوَابِ ﴿١٩٥﴾ لَا يَغْرَنَكَ تَقَلُّبُ
الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي الْبِلَادِ ﴿١٩٦﴾ مَتَاعٌ قَلِيلٌ ثُمَّ مَأْوَاهُمْ
جَهَنَّمُ ۖ وَبِئْسَ الْمِهَادُ ﴿١٩٧﴾ لَكِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ لَهُمْ جَنَّتٌ

تَجْرَى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خُلِدِينَ فِيهَا نَزَلَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ وَمَا
عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لِلْآبِرَارِ ﴿١٩٨﴾ وَإِنَّ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَمَنْ يُؤْمِنُ
بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْهِمْ خُشِعِينَ لِلَّهِ لَا
يَشْتَرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ
إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ ﴿١٩٩﴾

So, their Lord answered their prayer, "I do not let go to waste the labour of a worker from you, male or female. You are from one another. So, those who emigrated, and were expelled from their homes, and were tortured in My way, and fought, and were killed, I shall certainly write off their evil deeds, and shall certainly admit them into gardens beneath which rivers flow, being a reward from Allah. And it is Allah with Whom is the beauty of reward. [195] The moving of the disbelievers about the earth should not deceive you. [196] It is just a little enjoyment. After that their resort is Hell, and it is an evil abode. [197] But those who fear their Lord, for them there are Gardens beneath which rivers flow, where they shall live forever - hospitality from Allah. And what is with Allah is best for the righteous. [198] And surely, among the people of the Book there are those who believe in Allah and in what has been sent down to you and what has been sent down to them humbling themselves before Allah. They do not barter away the verses of Allah for paltry (worldly) gains. They have their reward with their Lord. Surely, Allah is swift at reckoning. [199]

Mentioned in verses previous to this were some prayers made by good believers.

The first verse (195) appearing above reports that these prayers have been accepted and believers have been given the good news that great rewards have been marked for their good deeds. In the second and third verses (196-197), Muslims have been instructed not to be deceived by the apparent affluence and worldwide maneuvering of disbelievers for this is transitory and the punishment which follows in its wake is eternal.

The fourth verse (198) reasserts the promise of the lasting blessings of Paradise for Muslims who always keep fearing Allah.

The fifth verse (199) particularly mentions the great reward that awaits those Muslims who used to be from among the People of the Book but chose to embrace Islam as their faith.

Commentary

While explaining the statement: لَا تَكْفِرْ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ (I shall certainly write off their evil deeds) in Verse 195, Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī has restricted it to the forgiveness of sins and shortcomings relating to the fulfillment of the rights of Allah. The reason is that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said in *Hadith* that debts are not included under the purview of this verse. The rule is that the person concerned or his heirs should pay off the debt or have it forgiven. There is no other alternative in this case unless Allah Almighty is specially generous for someone and puts it in the heart of the wronged party that they should relent and forgive. This would, then, be a different matter. In fact, with some, this would also be the case.

So, let us keep in mind that all sins are forgiven following *Hijrah* (Emigration) and *Shahādah* (Surrendering life in the way of Allah, martyrdom) but the forgiveness of debts and other rights of people (*Huqūqul-'Ibād*) has not been promised.

Verse 200

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اصْبِرُوا وَصَابِرُوا وَرَابِطُوا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٢٠٠﴾

O those who believe, be patient, be more patient than others, and guard your frontiers, and fear Allah, so that you may be successful. [200]

This is the last verse of Sūrah 'Āl-'Imrān. The advice given here is quintessential for all Muslims.

Commentary

There are three things in the verse Muslims have been charged with. These are *Ṣabr*, *Muṣābarah* and *Murābaṭah*. The fourth element is *Taqwā* which is a necessary ingredient of all three. Their meanings are being given below.

Literally, the Arabic word '*Ṣabr*' means 'to hold' or 'to tie'. In the terminology of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, '*Ṣabr*' is the effort made to control and defend one's slippery self against what is temperamentally displeasing. This '*Ṣabr*' (roughly translated as 'patience' for want of an exact equivalent) takes three forms:

1. Patience with Duties: It means that everything commanded by Almighty Allah and His Messenger must be obediently pursued, no matter how burdensome the adherence to them may appear to be. The aim is to keep one's self almost rivetted to carry out injunctions despite hinderances.

2. Patience against Sins: It means holding the desiring self back from whatever has been prohibited by Allah and His Messenger, no matter how desirable and appealing it may be.

3. Patience in Distress: It means enduring in hardship and forbearing in pain and avoiding excessive anxiety. Such patience requires that all pain and comfort be taken to have come from Allah and from this realization comes the strength to keep one's self under control.

The word, '*Muṣābarah*' is a derivation from *Ṣabr*. It means staying firm and steadfast against the enemy.

The word, '*Murābaṭah*' comes from '*Rabṭ*'. Root-wise, it means 'to tie' and it is for this reason that '*Ribāṭ*' and '*Murābaṭah*' are taken to mean 'to tie horses' and 'get ready for war'. The Holy Qur'ān has used '*Ribāṭ*' in وَمِنْ رِبَاطِ الْحَيْلِ (of trained horses - 8:60) in that very sense. However, in the terminology of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, this word has been used in two senses:

1. To secure Islamic frontiers for which it is necessary to be armed with military hardware, conventional or modern, so that the enemy abstains from venturing against Islamic frontiers.

2. To be so observant of and bound by making *Ṣalāh* with *Jamā'ah* that one starts looking forward to making the next *Ṣalāh* soon after having performed one.

Both these are highly acclaimed acts of worship in Islam. Out of their numerous merits, some are being given below:

Ribāṭ: The Guarding of Islamic Frontiers

Staying along the Islamic frontiers to guard the area in battle-ready condition is known as '*Ribāṭ*' and '*Murābaṭah*'. It takes two forms. Firstly, there may be no danger of war breaking out, the border is secure and the duty is limited to being vigilant enough to ward off any impending threat. Under such condition, it is quite permissible for those on duty to start living there with their families and earn their living through farming or some such occupation. Under this condition, if the real intention is to guard and defend Islamic borders and living and earning there remains subservient to this intention, this person will get the reward for 'staying in the way of Allah' (رِبَاطٌ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ), even if he never fights. But, anyone whose real intention is not to guard and defend Islamic frontiers but would simply be there to eke out a living - even if he gets the chance of guarding the borders casually - this person will not be considered as 'one who stays in the way of Allah'. The other eventuality may be that the border is threatened by possible enemy attack. Under such condition, keeping women and children close by is not correct; only those who can fight against the enemy should live there. (Qurtubī)

There are countless merits in both these cases. In the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī, it has been reported from Sayyidnā Sahl ibn Sa'd Sa'adī that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: *Ribāṭ* for a day in the way of Allah is better than whatever there is in the whole world. In the Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim, it has been reported from Sayyidnā Salmān that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: *Ribāṭ* for a day and night is better than fasting for a whole month and standing in prayers for the entire night. Should one die in that state, the daily reward for his act of staying in the way of Allah will continue to reach him for ever. His sustenance will keep coming from Almighty Allah and he will stay protected against the Satan.

Abū Dawūd reports from Fuḍālah ibn 'Ubayd that the Holy Prophet

صلى الله عليه وسلم said: The roster of deeds credited to the person who dies ends with his death except in the case of a *Murābiṭ* (one who stays in the way of Allah) whose roster of good deeds goes on multiplying right through to the Day of Judgment and he remains covered against (the fear of punishment) on account of the scrutiny of deeds in his grave.

These narrations indicate that the act of staying in the way of Allah (*Ribāṭ*) is superior even to every charity the benefit of which keeps going on and on (*Ṣadaqah Jāriyah*). This is because the reward for charity the benefits of which continue lasts only upto the time people keep benefiting from the endowment of house, land, book or library. Once this benefit stops reaching people, the incumbent reward also stops. But, the reward of the person who stays in the way of Allah is not going to stop until the Day of Judgment. The reason is that Muslims as a community can continue doing what is good only when they are well-protected against enemy attacks. Thus, the act of a person who stays on to defend Islamic frontiers becomes the cause of good deeds performed by all Muslim in a peaceful setting. Therefore, the reward of such *Ribāṭ fī sabīlillāh* (staying in the way of Allah) will continue until the Day of Judgment. In addition to that, the reward for whatever other good deeds he used to do during his life in the world will continue without his having to actually do them. This is as it appears in ibn Mājah in an authentic narration from Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah where he reports that the Holy Prophet ﷺ said:

من مات مرابطا في سبيل الله أجرى عليه أجر عمله الصالح الذي كان يعمل وأجرى عليه رزقه وأمن من الفتان وبعثه الله يوم القيمة آمنا من الفزع (تفسير القرطبي)

One who dies in a state of *Ribāṭ* in the way of Allah, the reward of whatever good he used to do in his mortal life will continue and so will his sustenance and he will stay protected against Satan and Allah will raise him on the Day of *Qiyāmah* free from fear. (Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī)

The merits mentioned in this narration are subject to the condition that the person meets his death while staying on the border to guard Islamic frontiers. But, there are other reports which indicate that his

post-death reward will still continue even if he were to return alive back to his family.

Sayyidnā Ubayy ibn Ka'b narrates that the Holy Prophet ﷺ said: The reward for sincerely guarding the weak border area of Muslims for one day, other than those of Ramaḍān, is superior to the reward for continuous fasting and nightly worship for one hundred years. *Ribāt* for one day in Ramaḍān is superior to fasting and nightly worship for one thousand years (the narrator has expressed some doubt about the later). Then, he said: If Allah sends him back to his family in good health, no sin will be recorded in his name for a thousand years while good deeds will continue to be entered in his roster and the reward for his act of having stayed at the border to defend Islamic frontiers will keep coming to him until the Day of Judgment (Qurtubī).

Offering *Ṣalāh* with *Jamā'ah* and waiting for the next is also 'staying in the way of Allah'

Sayyidnā Abū Salamān ibn 'Abdur-Raḥmān narrates that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: I tell you something because of which Almighty Allah would forgive your sins and raise your spiritual status. These are: Making *Wuḍū* precisely and perfectly despite chilly weather or pain or wound because of which the washing of body parts that must be washed while making *wuḍū* may appear to be hard to do; and going to the *Masjid* time and again more than often; and waiting to make the next *Ṣalāh* following the one already made. Then, he said: ﷺ : For you, this is the *Ribāt* (staying to guard Islamic frontiers in the way of Allah).

After having reported this *ḥadīth*, Imām al-Qurtubī has said that in the light of this *ḥadīth* it can be hoped that a person who adheres to the practice of waiting between two prayers with congregation will receive the reward which has been mentioned in *aḥādīth* for *Ribāt* in the way of Allah.

Special Note:

In this verse, Muslims have been instructed to remain patient which is possible any time under all conditions. Relevant details have

appeared earlier. The second instruction given is to be more patient than others which is to be demonstrated while fighting disbelievers. The third instruction relates to a situation when an armed conflict with disbelievers is likely and there is the danger that fighting may erupt anytime. Finally comes the instruction to observe *Taqwā* (fear of Allah) which is the essence of everything one does and on which depends the Divine acceptance of what has been done. This set of instructions is the sum of almost all injunctions of the Shari'ah. May Almighty Allah give all of us the best of ability to act in accordance with these instructions.

**The Commentary on
Sūrah 'Āl-'Imrān ends here.**